Mentoring Dyad to Learning Community: A Narrative Case Study of the Evolution of a Workplace Peer Learning Support System

Thesis submitted by

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B.A., B.Ed.St., M.Ed.(Hons)

in March 2001

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Education

James Cook University

For

learners of all communities

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I, Josephine Margaret Balatti, declare that this is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or other award at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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Second Declaration

The research was conducted within the guidelines of "The National Health and Medical Research Council Statement on Human Experimentation and Supplementary Notes." The research received ethical clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (Approval Number H491).

Acknowledgements

This study has gone on for a long time. Along the journey I have travelled with many companions who, in different ways, have contributed to my arriving at this point. Some such as my family have been with me the whole time. Others, including fellow postgraduate students have been companions for one or two years or a mere few months. With others still, our time together has been a fleeting couple of hours or even minutes while we waited for a cab in a hotel foyer. I thank all these people for the formal talks, informal chats, and passing comments about how we adults learn and mentor one another. These conversations helped me make progress with my own learning journey. To these people, I add the administration and technical staff at James Cook University who helped me negotiate the University system and the vagaries of computers and software packages.

The experience of being an on-site researcher for almost eighteen months in a company is priceless. For this I need to thank Dr John Edwards who invited me to join his existing team of John O'Brien, Dr Jim Butler, Dr Donna Rigano, and Bronwyn Houldsworth to work on the major collaborative project of which this study was a part. Working with a research team proved a very rich and rewarding experience that made that part of the journey less lonely. When the project ended and we relocated to different parts of the country, John and I maintained contact. Four years after the fieldwork ended John willingly read my thesis and I thank him for his insights which have proved invaluable.

To the men and women involved in the research project at Copper Refineries Limited in Townsville, North Queensland I owe an enormous debt. Almost all now have gone on to other places, but their vision and willingness to share their ideas and experiences made this study possible. I would like to especially thank Peter Andrew who was the H R Development Officer at the time. Four years later I have again called on the generosity of Peter and Ross Wotherspoon, the then Acting General Manager, to comment on this thesis.

Associate Professor Dawn Francis, my supervisor, has been a source of constant inspiration. I have valued her strong and non-intrusive academic and emotional support. During our time together she, too, has experienced a learning journey, forced upon her by a major stroke. I would like to thank Dr Merle Iles who graciously agreed to be my supervisor for a year when Dawn was unwell.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the contribution to this study made by my six month sojourn as Research Fellow with the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia at the University of Tasmania. My time at the Centre caused me to re-imagine my study. I would like to thank the Director, Associate Professor Ian Falk; Margaret Falk; and the staff of the Centre for the abundance of ideas and learning opportunities made available.

The project that this study draws on was funded from 1995–1996 by an Australian Research Council Collaborative Research Grant. From 1998 to halfway through 2000 I was supported by an Australian Postgraduate Research Award.

Abstract

In organisations, the mentoring program has become a common intervention used to promote workplace learning. Formal mentoring is a systematic attempt to reproduce, manage, and improve on those informal relationships in everyday life where one person fosters the learning of another in a supportive yet challenging way. The application of mentoring programs in diverse contexts and for diverse purposes has produced multiple interpretations of mentoring practice.

This ethnographic, narrative case study documents and analyses the evolution of an eighteen-month long mentoring program involving approximately fifty staff members in an industrial worksite. The program belongs to the category of workplace mentoring programs designed to provide peer support for learners undertaking professional development courses. In its initial form this program failed to meet the needs of its participants. The thesis reveals how the tension produced by different and sometimes conflicting notions of what it means to mentor led participants to explore new ways of helping one another learn.

The aim of the study is to provide explanations for the difficulties experienced in the program and for the ways in which the program evolved. In so doing, it considers the capacity of the conventional mentor–mentee dyad arrangement to help professionals learn. Secondly, it identifies alternative models of peer learning support systems. Lastly, it shows that the concept of social capital is useful in helping explain the dynamics of peer learning support systems and in identifying the contribution that such systems make to the organisations in which they are located.

The primary source of data used for the study is transcriptions of mentor meetings. Transcripts of a series of interviews conducted with all the participants during the program are used to check events, issues, and themes that were evident or emerging at the mentor meetings. Written data are also used and include summaries, agendas and minutes of meetings, and journal entries written by the participants and by the researcher.

In the thesis two modes of explanation are used to explain how and why the program evolved. The first is narrative and in the thesis the evolution of the mentoring program is reconstructed as a stage play. The second involves re-interpretations of the narrative using the literature on formal mentoring and adult learning theories that view learning as a social practice.

This thesis raises concerns about the limitations of the formal mentoring relationship as the cornerstone of peer learning support structures in the workplace. The mentor–mentee dyad with its associated differentials of expertise and position was found to be unacceptable to this group of participants. While the formal mentor–mentee relationship was, in most cases, rejected, a mentoring style to interactions was welcomed and developed. In this case a mentoring style came to mean one characterised by effective listening and facilitative questioning in an environment where there was sufficient trust for the learner to risk voicing assumptions and making errors.

This study suggests that more egalitarian and less structured learning partnerships between multiple learners have more potential for fostering workplace learning than the mentoring dyad. It found that a community of practice comprising interconnected learning groups which are ongoing, have flexible membership, and are facilitated by peers skilled in a mentoring style of interaction can be more valuable than conventional mentoring programs. The study also identifies social capital as a resource that is used and generated in peer learning support systems and which should be accounted for in their design and evaluation.

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Chapter One

Subject of the research

1.1 Introduction

For many, the term "mentoring" evokes a positive image of a respectful, trusting, and mutually satisfying relationship between a wise and experienced person, the mentor, and a less experienced other, the mentee or learner. Until recent times, such relationships would have emerged, evolved, and dissolved only in the private realm of people's lives.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century the dynamic of mentoring was transformed as organisations began attempting to harness the capacity of this naturally occurring phenomenon. Programs matching mentors with mentees are now being designed to simulate natural mentoring for the purposes of achieving particular kinds of workplace learning. As a result, the mentoring relationship has been taken from the private realm to the public arena. When mentoring is in a program context it is variously described as organised, facilitated, structured, or formal. Outside this context, it is described as natural or informal mentoring.

Despite the endorsements of its many advocates and research reports that identify positive outcomes (Caldwell & Carter, 1993b; Clutterbuck, 1991; Lewis, 1996; Matters, 1998; Merriam, 1983), research has also shown that as a social intervention in organisational life, facilitated mentoring has produced mixed results. The difficulties encountered in implementing mentoring programs and the sometimes less than expected outcomes have been documented (Gibb, 1999; Long, 1997). Notwithstanding the problems, interest from organisations in mentoring programs does not seem to have abated. In this thesis I tell of a mentoring program that encountered its own set of difficulties. In this case the participants themselves identified the problems and explored different solutions.

This thesis is an ethnographic, narrative case study of a workplace mentoring program in which the participants and especially the mentors worked together to search for ways of mentoring that were effective in their workplace. It reveals how the tension produced by different and sometimes conflicting notions of what it means to mentor led to new ways of helping one another learn. The alternatives developed bear little resemblance to the mentoring relationships that sometimes occur informally between two people in everyday life. In this case, interconnected learning support groups in which a mentoring style of interaction was promoted proved more appropriate peer support arrangements than the conventional mentor–mentee dyads. Amongst the participants in this study, a mentoring style came to mean one characterised by effective listening and facilitative questioning in an environment where there was sufficient trust for the learner to risk voicing assumptions and making errors.

The alternatives developed in this workplace arguably stretch the notion of mentoring beyond what is generally regarded as facilitated or formal mentoring as described in the literature. A term that better describes the peer learning support system that developed is that of a "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998).

This chapter tells of the purpose of this case study and how I came to that purpose. It helps establish a sense of the ways in which this case study is unique and yet similar to other studies of organised mentoring in terms of both the case itself and how it was researched. With Chapter One, I am also placing this narrative within the broader narrative of how mentoring moved from the private domain to the public arena. It is in light of this migration of the mentoring relationship into the formal workplace mentoring program that I discuss the significance of this study.

In this chapter I also introduce a second narrative, my account of the collaborative research experience I shared with the program's participants. Although secondary its inclusion assists understanding the main narrative. In addition, it makes a contribution to the body of knowledge on doing collaborative research.

The chapter concludes with a description of how the thesis unfolds in the subsequent chapters. I now begin with a brief overview of the mentoring program to establish why this case study predominantly concerns itself with how a group of people went about *learning* to mentor in an organised mentoring context.

1.2 Learning to mentor

In this thesis I tell of the experiences of a group of professional men and women who volunteered to participate in a mentoring program at a copper refinery in Australia in the mid 1990s. Over an eighteen-month period, managers, engineers, metallurgists, scientists, programmers, accountants, and administrators entered formal mentoring relationships in which they were mentors or mentees. From a total workforce of about 460 employees, some fifty staff members participated in the peer learning support program. Of the fifty, eighteen were mentors at some time during the project and the rest were mentees.

The mentoring program was part of a large three-year joint government and industry funded research project (hereafter commonly referred to as the Project) involving Copper Refineries Pty Ltd (CRL), James Cook University (JCU), and the University of Queensland (UQ). The Project was designed to look at improving professional performance through an Action Thinking Change model (Butler, 1994, 1996). Participants in the research project undertook individual action learning projects that had reflection on practice as the key component. Because the participants referred to these projects as ALEs (Action Learning Explorations), I shall also call them ALEs. The main purpose of the ALEs was to provide a focus for participants to better understand how they learned in their everyday work and how to improve that learning. The primary purpose of the mentoring program was to assist participants with their ALEs.

For eighteen months, the participants in the Project struggled individually and collectively to construct notions and practices of mentoring that they could personally live with, that were compatible with their other workplace practices, and that met the aims of the program. Although some abandoned the struggle, most did not. From the very beginning, the mentoring arrangements implemented and even the term "mentor" met with resistance. For most participants, the formal mentor–mentee arrangements experienced in the program seemed to have very little in common with their personal experiences of mentoring. Although some participants managed to develop mutually satisfying mentoring relationships, traditional mentor–mentee relationships, for the most part, did not take root.

Despite this resistance and lack of success, the mentors as a group developed other ways of helping one another learn. The new multiple forms of peer learning support arrangements trialled—and outlined later in this chapter—did prove to be more successful than those that had been initially implemented. From my position as the on-site researcher I not only heard about their experiences in interviews, but I was also able to witness and share in some of them as well. From the inception of the program to its premature demise, I was able to document the group's struggles and achievements.

What soon became evident in this case was that learning to mentor was going to become the major focus for the participants and of my research. This thesis therefore is primarily a narrative reconstruction of individual and collective experiences—especially those of the mentors—that led to learnings about mentoring and to the evolution of the peer learning support system.

1.3 What is facilitated mentoring?

Organised or facilitated mentoring, of which this program is an example, is a late twentieth century phenomenon. In a time span of twenty to twenty-five years, mentoring has become a strategy in the personal and professional development initiatives of companies, universities, schools, hospitals, and organisations. It is being embraced by organisations, agencies, and community groups to improve work performance and to redress imbalances of gender, race, and class. At the time of writing, a mentoring program complete with a "mentor nook" in the library is available to undergraduates at my university. Students are walking the corridors with the word "MENTOR" emblazoned in block letters across the backs of their shirts. Another mentoring program was recently funded for women academics at the same university. At a nearby major hospital a mentoring program is being established for its nurses. The Federal government funds mentoring programs in the community. For example, in my city of Cairns in Queensland a program funded by the Department of Family and Community Services is currently running to support youth at risk. These examples are illustrative of the diverse range of purposes for which mentoring programs are designed.

The facilitated workplace mentoring relationship attempts to replicate the dynamics of the naturally occurring mentoring relationship for the purposes of achieving particular organisational goals. Many definitions of mentoring have been used in programs. Within this diversity, Jacobi (1991, p. 513) identifies five elements about which there is strong agreement. In summary, they are:

- The mentoring relationship is a helping relationship focused on achievement.
- Mentoring serves at least one of three functions: emotional and psychological support; direct assistance with career and professional development; and role modelling.
- Both mentor and mentee derive benefits from the relationship that are benefits other than fee for service.
- Mentoring relationships are personal relationships between a mentor and mentee involving an exchange of information.
- Relative to the mentee, the mentor possesses greater experience, influence, and achievement within the organisation.

Workplace mentoring programs are implemented to foster vocational learning, leadership and management expertise, and career path development. They are used as a strategy either to help enculturate new employees into an existing organisational culture or to help employees adapt to cultural change. Mentoring programs are also used as a developmental tool to support personal and professional growth of employees in professional development initiatives that include workshops and courses. This was the intent of the program in this study.

There is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes mentoring in organisations and particularly in formal mentoring programs. Dalton, Thompson, and Price (1977, cited in Zagumny, 1993) claim that the complex nature of mentoring relationships precludes a definitive description. A mentoring program is subject to even further complexities because the idiosyncrasies of the organisation intersect with those of the individual mentor and mentee (Gladstone, 1988 cited in Garvey, 1994b). Constructed by managers, staff development consultants, and academics for different purposes to describe different processes in different contexts, the concept of mentoring has developed what Gibb (1999, online) calls an "elasticity" that hinders rather than helps understanding and theorising.

Even the traditional arrangement of two people comprising the mentor–mentee dyad can no longer be assumed. For example, Burney (1998) describes the Mentor–Protégé Program operated by the Department of Defense in the United States of America that fosters successful partnerships between big defence contractors and small, disadvantaged businesses. In this case, the dyad is two organisations.

In some of the cases where the mentoring relationship is still between two people, the differentials that traditionally used to exist between the mentor and the mentee seem no longer a prerequisite. These include differentials in levels of expertise, in positions within the organisational hierarchy, and in age as well. In peer mentoring relationships for example, these differentials can be obliterated without the mentoring function supposedly being compromised (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Peer mentoring actually describes two kinds of dyad arrangements. One arrangement is a learning relationship in which both partners assume the role of mentor and mentee (Fine & Pullins, 1998). These relationships, which are also called co-mentoring relationships, are founded on the belief that each partner is able to help the other in his or her professional development even if they do have comparable levels of expertise. The second kind of peer mentoring arrangement is one where there is a mentor and mentee, but the mentor is not a superior in the organisation to the mentee. For example, the mentor may be a colleague whom the mentee has asked to be a sounding board and coach for a particular purpose (Peters, 1996). Another example of this kind of configuration is co-workers who are temporarily allocated as mentors to new recruits to assist with their transition to a new role or workplace (Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997).

The notion of mentoring can also extend beyond the dyad to group mentoring. As with peer mentoring, this, too, may refer to two very different kinds of configuration. In the first, an experienced member of the workforce collectively mentors a group of employees. In this mentoring arrangement, Kaye and Jacobson (1996) describe the mentor as the "learning leader" and the group of mentees as a "learning group." In the second, it is the group rather than any single individual that is the mentor. Dansky (1996, online) defines the mentoring role that a group can have for its members as "a group influence that emerges from the social norms and roles that are characteristic of a specific group and results in the career enhancement of an individual member." One interesting feature of this second definition is confining the notion of mentoring to those social processes that have a career advancement outcome. Another unusual feature is defining the mentoring role in terms of a group influence rather than that of an individual.

Despite these new applications of mentoring, the mentor–mentee dyad continues to be the main arrangement in mentoring programs. In general, then, formal mentoring refers to "a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed–upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies" (Murray, 1991, p. xiv). In contrast, Daloz (1986) proposes a definition of mentoring that has more to do with its spirit than with its structure. He describes the mentor as a guide who supports and challenges the mentee on a learning journey along which he or she experiences transformative change. In fact, it was Daloz's interpretation that informed the training workshops for the mentoring program in this study. The training consultants had asked the mentors to "help people grow" and this was to become the mentor group's own motto.

Organised mentor–mentee pairings, and the less common kinds of mentoring arrangements such as mentoring groups, usually occur within a structured program. The literature contains many models that identify the components of a mentoring program and their interrelationships (Clutterbuck, 1991; Murray, 1991; Lewis, 1996). The common elements of a mentoring program comprise a set of management goals for the program; a definition of the mentoring role; protocols for matching mentors to mentees; an agreed upon period of time and context in which the mentoring takes place; and a process for evaluating the program. Although by no means universal, most programs also have some initial training for mentors and less commonly for mentees.

The program in this study had all these elements including a two–day training workshop for mentors and a short training session of two to three hours for mentees. It also had an additional element in its design. The design of the entire professional development project, of which the mentoring program was a part, consisted of a series of phases each approximately six months long. The phase structure permitted new intakes of participants as well as the opportunity for others to withdraw. Each phase began with training workshops for new and existing participants at which the experience of the previous phase was reviewed. Participants' recommendations for change were discussed with the training consultants and, if agreed upon by the group, were implemented in the next phase. This mechanism facilitated the evolution of the mentoring program.

1.4 Purpose of the case study

The proliferation of mentoring programs in the last two decades has produced an extensive mentoring literature, especially of case studies. To different degrees, most case studies have either an evaluative or prescriptive purpose and tend to follow a common format. The case study usually describes a program in terms of the various components or elements I outlined earlier. It then lists the outcomes for the different stakeholders—the company, the mentor, the mentee, and sometimes the manager of the mentee. It identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the program and also makes recommendations for future changes. The most common sources of data for these studies are written questionnaires or sets of interviews with a sample of the participant group. In most cases these data are collected toward the end of the program.

This thesis, too, is a case study of a mentoring program, but it differs from most others in two major respects. First, in this case data collection was ongoing. I observed or participated in mentoring-related activities on a weekly basis and I formally interviewed participants twice every six months. Second, in contrast with most of the case studies found in the mentoring literature, the principal focus of this case study is neither evaluative nor prescriptive. My purpose is primarily explanatory.

My purpose comes from the fact that the most notable feature of this case is that the program changed. Although research has been done on how individual mentoring relationships develop over time (Kram, 1985), to my knowledge no studies document the evolution of a mentoring program. In this case, as the participants learnt from experience what formal mentoring meant in the context of their workplace and the research project, they went about changing the mentoring arrangements. The new social arrangements trialled in each of the three phases (see Figure 1.1) are indicative of the learning that took place during the eighteen months.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the general trend toward multiple peer learning support arrangements. These ranged from the traditional mentor–mentee dyad to support groups led by a group mentor. Each of the components in the diagram will be described in detail in subsequent chapters, but the figure is included here to provide an overview of how the program changed. As the narrative I write will reveal, these changes were only some amongst many others impacting on, or brought about by, the participants' experience.

In addition to the changes experienced by the project members, my own participation in the project changed. The initial research design positioned the researcher outside the participant group as observer only. Over time this became increasingly untenable for two reasons. First, individual relationships developed between the project participants and myself. Second, the participants and I developed an understanding of what it meant to collaborate in this project and what our mutual obligations were to the enterprise. Consequently my role as researcher changed from that of the detached observer to, at different times, being a participant in the program, an observer, and a critical friend.

The question that all these changes constantly raised for me was why? Why was it that so many participants—both mentors and mentees alike—felt ill at ease with the term mentor? Why did the term itself persist? Why was it that, in the main, the initial mentoring structures that had been designed by the consultants in collaboration with management did not prove to be workable? Why did the mentors throughout the life of the program continue to regularly meet to reflect on existing mentoring arrangements and create new ones? Why did they persevere? Why was it that some of these new structures that placed the mentor in a far less traditional role prove more successful? And lastly, why did my participation change and what affect did this have on the program?

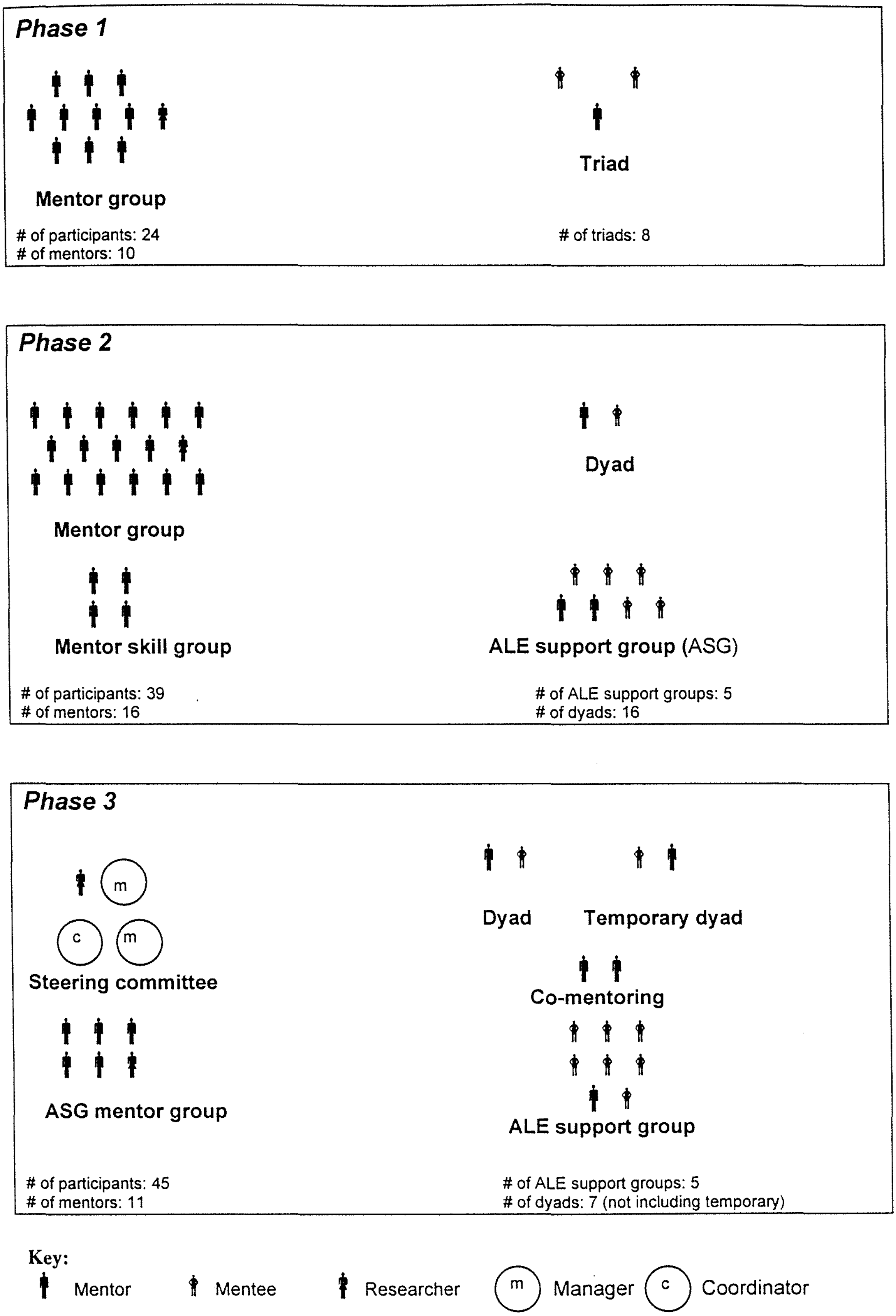

Figure 1.1. Evolution of the peer learning support system

These are some of the questions that led me to write this thesis. In this thesis I have tried to distil the multitude of questions and impressions that the field experience produced into the exploration of four questions, namely:

> Why did the peer learning support system have so many problems?
>
> Why did it evolve in the way it did?
>
> Was the peer learning support system worth it?
>
> Why did my participation as researcher change in the program?

My interest in this case therefore lies primarily in *how* and *why* this particular program changed in the ways it did. Evaluating its outcomes and recommending possible modifications are secondary in importance. Furthermore, my intent is not to hypothesise about the general pattern of development that mentoring programs might follow if placed in the hands of participants. In contrast to Kram (1985) who sought to find a developmental pattern discernible across many mentoring relationships, this study comprises one case only. Nevertheless, as Stake (1995) argues, much that is general can be learned from the individual case.

To use Stake's (1995) distinction between an intrinsic case study and an instrumental case study, my primary objective is to understand this particular mentoring program because of its intrinsic interest. This is due to its difference from other programs. However, the case study also has instrumental value. Despite the reasons for its uniqueness, this case still has enough similarities with other mentoring programs to permit its classification as one. Hence this case study adds to the body of knowledge on facilitated mentoring in organisational settings and to that of peer learning support systems more generally. It also contributes to our knowledge on doing long term collaborative research between universities and organisations that involves social interventions.

Because my purpose is explanatory, I use several modes of explanation to give different and, of necessity, partial accounts of what happened. Here I describe them briefly and in the next two chapters they are discussed in detail.

First and foremost, I appeal to the explanatory power of narrative. Narrative does more than chronicle a series of events or changes. From a psychological perspective, Polkinghorne (1988, p. 6) explains that narrative makes meaning "by noting the contributions that actions and events make to a particular outcome and then configures these parts into a whole episode." It shows how the unique connections between those events that unfolded in a particular space and span of time produced an overall effect.

Narrative interpretation is not about establishing proof. Bruner (1986, 1991) explains that narrative is concerned more with possible reasons for why things happened in a particular way. This means that there is no one "true" story and all that I can do in this thesis is provide a critically reconstructed narrative in which I try to make space for other interpretations of what happened besides my own.

To help understand what happened in this case I also compare it with others. From case reports, Stake argues that "we learn both propositional and experiential knowledge" (1994, p. 240). Propositional knowledge is explicated knowledge and according to Stake, experiential knowledge can be more than what we produce from direct experience. It also includes knowledge produced from vicarious experiences that occur when we read case reports. Although reviewers of the mentoring literature (Gibb, 1999; Jacobi, 1991) have critiqued much of it for its lack of a theoretical base, it is useful to me because it tells stories, albeit sometimes perfunctory, of mentoring programs that have worked and not worked successfully in other organisations. In comparing this case with others across particular dimensions, I am able to consider differences and similarities that provide insights into why this program developed in the ways it did. In contributing to a better understanding of this particular case, comparison also provides new insights into the nature of facilitated mentoring in general.

In addition to narrative as a mode of explanation, I also appeal to what Bruner (1991) calls the logico–scientific cognitive mode. I use models and theories that explain how adults learn to explore why the mentoring program evolved in the way it did. In particular, I use theories that view learning as a social practice (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Wenger, 1998).

So through narrative, I try to understand the case in terms of its specificity and interconnectedness of contexts and events. Through models and theories, I try to understand other aspects of the case in terms of abstract atemporal patterns. Both kinds of explanation are useful to better understand why and how this program evolved.

In the next chapter I explain how I came to this selection of interpretive frameworks that gives the thesis its particular form and content. The explanation constitutes a narrative in itself. The ways I finally chose to interpret this research experience were very different from my original intent. My choice was heavily influenced by what actually happened over the eighteen months. As Stake (1995) affirms, the ways in which data are interpreted in qualitative research, especially in qualitative case study research, are subject to what the researcher finds in the field. Even research questions may need to be modified or, indeed, be replaced. This happened in this study.

How I interpreted what had occurred in the field was also influenced by research experiences I was involved in two years after this project actually terminated. Robinson and Hawpe (1986, p. 123) use the term "narrative repair" to describe the way we revise narratives in the light of new information or new perspectives. In this case, narrative repair continued well after the mentoring program finished and, in some ways, is still continuing as I write.

The contribution that this study makes to the field of facilitated mentoring comes from the intrinsic nature of the case itself and from the methods I use to interpret what happened. Before discussing the significance of this study, I will outline a bigger narrative in which the story of this particular mentoring program is embedded. The bigger narrative concerns the evolution of the notion of mentoring up to this particular moment in time where it has encountered and been transformed by strong academic and management interest in how adults learn and how workplaces can maximise learning potential. In fact, the set of aims of this particular program is one example that reflects the connections that researchers, practitioners, and organisations are making between developing a company's learning capacity and mentoring. Placing the narrative of this specific program in the larger storyline of the evolution of mentoring also provides the context for understanding why many of the participants in this project were holding multiple and sometimes conflicting beliefs of what a mentoring relationship is about.

1.5 Positioning facilitated mentoring in the mentor motif

Through the imagination and lived experience the motif of mentor has woven itself into the consciousness of the western world. Fictional and non-fictional narratives have provided and continue to provide countless incarnations of the mentor as the trusted guide, wise counsellor, and critical friend. The mentor is commonly portrayed as male, as more experienced than the protégé or mentee in both life and work, and generally older. In the numerous representations in literary works, the mentor is generally depicted as acting out of selfless interest to foster the personal and professional growth of another (Seigneuret, 1988).

Mentor-like figures populate both our imaginations and everyday lives. Stories of mentoring relationships are plentiful in classical literature and in the popular culture of today. They are found in religious literature including the Bible and endure in classics such as Homer's *The Odyssey* (n.d./1967) and Dante's (Alighieri) *The Divine Comedy* (c. 1310–1314/1995). These works continue to provide sources of reflection and analysis for researchers of mentoring in the vastly different contexts of today (see for example, Garvey's (1994a) analysis of the relationship between Telemachus and Mentor in Homer's *The Odyssey* and Daloz's (1986) discussion of the mentoring relationship between Dante and Virgil in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*).

Representations of the mentor also proliferate in the modern day literature of comics, novels, and drama. Not all are equally laudable. One paternalistic and well known interpretation of the mentoring relationship is found in Lerner's (1959) musical comedy *My Fair Lady* adapted from British dramatist George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* produced in 1916. Here the mentor strives to remould the mentee into a persona of his own imagination. In these works the relationship between Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle displays what many today would consider a dysfunctional element that in fact harks back to a Greek myth told by Ovid about two thousand years ago in his work *Metamorphoses*. According to the story, Pygmalion, king of Cyprus, falls in love with the statue of a woman he sculpted. He believes that the statue reciprocates his love and, as myth has it, the statue, through Aphrodite's intervention, does eventually come to life.

Films, too, are a rich source of mentoring relationships. The *Karate Kid* trilogy (1984, 1986, 1989, directed by John Avildsen) for instance, tracks the developmental stages of a mentoring relationship. In film, the mentor has been variously portrayed as other worldly such as in *Star Wars* (1977, directed by George Lucas) and in *Field of Dreams* (1989, directed by Phil Alden Robinson), mortal, and even flawed as in *The Firm* (1993, directed by Sydney Pollack). In the 1980s and 1990s, it has been the American actor Robin Williams perhaps more than any other who has played very mortal but notable mentors in films such as *Dead Poets Society* (1989, directed by Peter Weir) and *Good Will Hunting* (1997, directed by Gus Van Sant).

The *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs* (Seigneuret, 1988) identifies the theme of divine tutor, which is one manifestation of the mentor, as one of the fifty most significant themes in the evolution of cultural history. Although context, character, and plot make each mentor unique, the many representations found in literary works tend to share common characteristics.

Seigneuret's analysis (1988) of the various literary manifestations concludes that the mentor, who in many cases is divine but not always, may act in a number of capacities. As a preceptor, the mentor presents "instruction through arguments and precepts to be learned"; as a coach of physical, emotional, and spiritual potential, the mentor "makes possible experiences that serve to prove and shape the character of the young person"; and as a wise person, the mentor is there to provide reflection on significant experiences (p. 396). When necessary, mentors are even there in a literal or figurative sense to rescue their protégés. The artistic device often used to provide the context and plot that enables the mentor to teach, advise, and nurture the learner is the journey. The journey or voyage can be physical or spiritual, allegorical or symbolic. Its function is to provide the opportunities through which the mentee experiences change.

That mentoring relationships exist in real life as well as in the imagination appears unquestioned. Biographies and autobiographies often refer to mentors who have had a strong influence during periods of the protagonists' lives (Garvey, 1994a). Like many of us, the participants in this study were able to recall experiences in their own lives in which either they had been mentored by people such as fathers, managers, or even scout leaders, or they themselves had mentored others such as students, co-workers, or young sportsmen and women. Interestingly, they often noted that at the time they would not have referred to the relationship as a mentoring relationship. It was only in retrospect that they would have described themselves as having been mentored or having mentored.

One notable and often cited study of naturally occurring mentoring relationships was an all male study that took place in the 1970s. In that study Levinson (1978) found that successful men had experienced special relationships that positively influenced their professional lives. These relationships displayed many of the mentoring qualities idealised in myth and other cultural forms. Levinson (1978, pp. 97–98) with his colleagues described this kind of relationship as

> one of the most complex, and developmentally important, a man can have in early adulthood.... No word currently in use is adequate to convey the nature of the relationship we have in mind here. Words such as "counsellor" or "guru" suggest the more subtle meanings, but they have other connotations that would be misleading. The term "mentor" is generally used in a much narrower sense, to mean teacher, adviser, or sponsor. As we use the term, it means all these things, and more.

In the late twentieth century, at least in societies where western cultures are strong, the mentor figure materialised in the public arena of the organisation. The springboard wasn't Greek mythology, biblical stories, or the epics; rather, it was the literature of psychology and management. Writers (Gay, 1994; Jacobi, 1991; Daloz, 1986) concur that it was, in fact, Levinson's longitudinal developmental study in the 1970s that drew attention to the significance of the mentor in people's lives. Kanter's (1977) and Roche's (1979) publications also identified the relationship between attaining professional success and having a sponsor or mentor in one's professional life.

Organisations recognised that informal mentoring was already occurring amongst some of their staff and that even the old trade model of "apprentice, journeyman, and master" demonstrated mentoring principles. However, the ad hoc nature of such informal mentoring meant that results were uneven and sometimes even negative. By sponsoring planned mentoring programs that targeted specific groups within the organisation for specific purposes, management hoped that better results and more leverage could be gained from managed mentoring relationships than from informal or naturally occurring mentoring.

The advent of the "learning organisation" (Garvin, 1993; Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell, 1991; Senge, 1992; Watkins & Marsick, 1993) stimulated even more interest in mentoring especially as a strategy to help people learn on a one–to–one basis in the workplace. Watkins and Marsick (1993, p. 8) define a learning organisation as follows:

> The learning organization is one that learns continuously and transforms itself. Learning takes place in individuals, teams, the organization, and even the communities with which the organization interacts. Learning is a continuous, strategically used process—integrated with, and running parallel to, work.... The learning organization has embedded systems to capture and share learning.

To varying degrees, workplaces have embraced the ideology and practices of the learning organisation to better respond to a changing environment that is often called the knowledge society (Drucker, 1993). The need for employees to be effective learners has become critical in a marketplace where knowledge and its applications have replaced labour and capital as the major source of economic growth (Drucker, 1993). In the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, attention turned to new management styles that fostered learning environments. Included amongst these is a mentoring style approach to management that has managers and supervisors change from "monitors and controllers to coaches and mentors" (London, 1992, p. 53) or more succinctly, that has them change "from cop to coach" (McMahon, 1993, p. 113).

With the need to increase its capacity to learn, industry has taken a stronger interest in a theoretical understanding of adult learning. Trainers and management now conceptualise the workplace—whether it be the factory floor, the boardrooms, or the R & D laboratories—as learning spaces. Revans' (1982) action learning, Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, and Schon's (1983) reflective practitioner have become part of the literature that informs deliberately designed learning practices in the workplace. It is not that surprising then that this thesis derives from a research project conducted in an industrial worksite by a team of six researchers from Faculties of Education rather than, say, Faculties of Business or Management. It is also not surprising that this mentoring program was not about helping people learn a specific work related task. Rather, it was about helping people learn how to learn more effectively.

In the last two decades, the literature on facilitated mentoring has in quantitative terms outstripped by far any literature on naturally occurring mentoring relationships. Despite attempts at the scientification of the mentoring process, the meaning of mentoring in facilitated programs continues to defy packaging. As a result, customised definitions of mentoring begin almost all papers or books on the topic. Jacobi (1991) for example, laments the lack of a generally recognised operational definition of mentoring and lists fifteen definitions as an indication of the diversity that exists.

Furthermore, the practical reasonableness of some of the definitions has become doubtful. In reviewing mentoring programs for teachers, Roberts and Chernopiskaya (1999, p. 83) question the "daunting repertoire of skills and attributes" that mentors should supposedly possess and ask themselves how such a role description came about. From the perspective of the participants in a facilitated mentoring program, this study will show that the number of definitions and the expectations imposed on mentors and mentees alike have made the mentoring arrangement potentially confusing and in some cases inoperable.

In this brief outline I have attempted to portray chronologically the development of facilitated mentoring. In shifting the mentoring relationship from the natural to the programmed, the essence of the mentor relationship is conceptualised very differently. Where in the private mentoring dyad of literature, film, or private life the rewards of the experience are enjoyed by the two people involved, mentoring in the organisational format hopes to reap rewards for the individuals and for the organisation. Not only that, it is anticipated that those rewards can in great measure be programmed to materialise.

At this point in history, expressions of both informal mentoring and facilitated mentoring co-exist, albeit sometimes uncomfortably. Consequently, participants in a program may find that they're being asked to conceptualise mentoring in ways that are inconsistent with their own understandings of what mentoring should be. The mentoring program in this study became a ground for such contested meanings. The understandings participants brought with them based on their own personal mentoring experiences, direct, or indirect, often appeared incompatible with how mentoring was supposed to be conducted in this program. This disequilibrium ultimately produced new interpretations of mentoring that permitted some participants to engage in more meaningful learning relationships.

1.6 Significance of the study

For a story to be worth telling, Bruner (1991, p. 11) explains that it needs to breach the expected or the norm: "A tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner to do violence to what Hayden White [1987] calls the 'legitimacy' of the canonical script."

With this study there was indeed a story to be told; in fact, there were a number of stories. If the mentoring literature is the "canonical script," the breaches concern both the subject of the story and how the story is told. As I continue to read studies about organisational mentoring programs, I am becoming more certain that this particular program was significantly different from most others in terms of its aims and how it was operationalised. Also different to most other studies is the perspective I have taken in its investigation. In these differences lies the significance of this research as well as many of its limitations which I reflect upon in the final chapter.

The first major difference between this study and others is that the subject is a mentoring program that is unlike most others. For example, in most workplace programs, the mentor selection process and the learning area that the mentoring program targets are both closely tied into the existing structures and practices of the workplace. Mentors are usually selected for their recognised expertise in a specific and identifiable knowledge area that mentees need to develop to better do their work. This program made such a match difficult because the learning that this mentoring program aimed to foster was less tangible and more diverse than, say, learning the skills and know–how associated with a job or position. The program aimed to provide the support and challenge needed to help people learn whatever and however they had planned in the ALEs. The focus of the ALEs was learning to reflect on one's practice. As a result the mentor selection process challenged the traditional differences between mentor and mentee in terms of expertise, and in some cases, age and status. For the participants, this was to mean attempting to reconcile their prior understandings of mentoring with what was possible in the context of the ALEs. For management, it meant ongoing frustrations in determining the value of the program. For the researchers, the program meant the opportunity to gain further insights into how workplace mentoring may be used to help people learn how to learn.

Also unusual was that the ongoing running of the program was in the hands of the participants. In consultation with management, the training consultants—who were also the Chief Investigators in the research project—did introduce the program into the workplace, but they encouraged the mentors to assume responsibility for it—which they did. By virtue of its design, company commitment, and participant commitment, the program had the space and time to evolve—and it did. Over time, new experience–based understandings and possibilities for helping one another learn developed that would otherwise not have had the opportunity to arise. It is these new understandings and the factors that permitted their development that make an important contribution to the field of facilitated mentoring and to the field of peer learning support systems more generally.

As well as the case being unusual, so was its investigation. A research method using ethnographic techniques is not a common approach to the study of mentoring programs. Lareau and Shultz (1996) describe ethnography in its broadest sense as a study that uses participant–observation and in–depth interviewing over an extended period of time. This study employed those techniques to help understand the meanings that this community—the participants of the professional development program and, in particular, the group of mentors—made of new practices called mentoring.

The open-ended approach in the research design made it possible to develop a research methodology that harmonised with the evolving lived experience of the men and women involved in the program. Preconceived criteria for determining the program's success or otherwise were absent; the program itself was open to change; the nature and extent of my engagement in the program were open to change, as were the methods for data generation. Participants told of their mentoring experiences in different settings including interviews with me, meetings with their colleagues, discussions at workshops and at meetings with the training consultants. Some wrote in their journals. The fact that I was based at the refinery for two or three days a week gave me access to data that pre- and post- tests supplemented with one or two interviews could not.

The nature of the mentoring program together with an ethnographic narrative approach to the inquiry has led to new understandings of what mentoring and other forms of peer learning support may mean in an industrial workplace. Hence this program, different in many respects but similar enough in others to allow it to be located in the field of formal workplace mentoring, has sensitised me to what Gusfield (1992) describes as the rhetoric of the field. Rhetoric, Gusfield explains, is "the study of argument and persuasion as a facet of human interaction, of reason as well as emotion" (p. 120). Gusfield argues that when the books, chapters of books, conference proceedings, and papers in a field are considered as a whole, one can discern a

> total framework of assumptions and interests [that] persuades the audience by the way in which the object of study is delineated and described.... No one study will yield the way in which a set of assumptions constitutes a dominant paradigm for constructing phenomena. It will provide an understanding of the rhetoric of a single study but, by ignoring the total effect of a field, tells us little about what is not studied. It gives us the voices but not the silences.... This kind of rhetoric is part of what Gramsci referred to as cultural hegemony. It restricts and channels what is thinkable and unthinkable.

In the field defined by the literature on facilitated mentoring, Gusfield would argue that dominant frames operate to construct mentoring, the personae of mentor and mentee, the writer, and even the audience in particular ways. In studying a mentoring program that was allowed to "breathe" and evolve, this inquiry helps reveal some of these frames and in addition, makes some of the "silences" audible. It shows that when the private and personal act of mentoring is transplanted into the public domain and the mentoring relationship is made an object of social engineering, what it means to mentor and to be mentored are transformed.

The main objective of this thesis is to contribute to the existing literature on mentoring and other peer learning support systems for the practical use of those considering implementing workplace support programs. However, this thesis also contributes to the practical knowledge available on collaborative research. Woven into the main plot of how the mentoring program developed is also the narrative of my changing experience as an on-site researcher. I had had no previous experience in this kind of research and my coming to understand the research experience in the field as a collaboration took time.

Levin (1993, p. 331) describes collaborative research as that which is "conducted with the active participation of people in an organizational setting, with the goal of producing knowledge which is meaningful and useful both for academic purposes and to the people in the setting being studied." Couched in product rather than process–oriented terms, this definition provides no understanding of what the verb "to collaborate" means. Yet this definition essentially encapsulated the sum total of my understanding of how to do collaborative research when I first began the project. In contrast, eighteen months later, it was Ulichny and Schoener's (1996) definition of collaborative research between teacher and researcher that was resonating far more powerfully with my experience. They explain that collaboration for them "came to mean determining mutual goals for the research, sharing responsibility for the research product, and building a trusting relationship that permitted interdependence and mutuality between teacher and researcher" (p. 496).

This thesis tells of how I came to an experiential understanding of what Ulichny and Schoener mean. I tell of the empowering capacity that such an understanding brings to the researcher, but I also tell of the emotional and intellectual discomfort that it often caused me. Well after the field experience ended, I made meaning of the collaborative research experience through using Wenger's (1998) notion of communities of practice to explain my changing identity both in the research team and in the participant group.

Finally, this thesis also has a personal significance. It is a story of my journey towards furthering my understanding of what the endeavour of research, especially collaborative research is about; of what mentoring, especially in a structured form is about; and of what I, as a learner and a facilitator of learning am about. Daloz (1986) describes the education experience for adult learners as a transformational journey along which the traveller, through trial and tribulation, losing direction, regaining it and then losing it again, changes profoundly. This thesis is evidence of my own personal transformational journey.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

The metaphorical concept I have chosen to interpret my research experience is that of narrative. Richardson (1994, p. 520) explains that "metaphors organize sociological work and affect the interpretations of the 'facts'; indeed, facts are interpretable ('make sense') only in terms of their place within a metaphoric structure."

In the next chapter, I explain how I came to choose narrative as the main metaphor for interpreting this experience. I describe the significance of this choice of metaphor to the study and the choices it led me to make in the various stages of the research project.

Chapter Three reviews the literature on mentoring programs for the purpose of placing the program that is the subject of this study in the field of organised mentoring. Because the narrative is mainly about how the mentors themselves learned, the second half of the chapter presents theories on adult learning with which to interpret their experience. My discussion of the literature on facilitated mentoring and adult learning in this chapter is the result of a dialectic relationship between what I have been reading and what I experienced first hand. While the literature has contributed to how I interpreted what was happening in this particular case, the reverse is also true. The experience of the case also led me to reinterpret the literature from fresh perspectives. This has included a reconsideration of the value of mentoring programs to an organisation in terms of their capacity to add to the organisation's social capital (Coleman, 1988).

Chapter Four details the backgrounds required to make sense of the narrative. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 413) explain that the status of a passage as representing experience "depends on what we choose to convey contextually." The company, the professional development training, and the mentoring program are described. I also outline the pre–story and post–story of the project and the company including the events that led to the research project taking place in the copper refinery. The pre–stories are important because they influenced both the research and the mentoring processes. The post–stories describe what happened, after the project terminated, to the company, to the employees involved in the project, and to the research team. These, too, are important because what eventuated was foreshadowed during the project and influenced people's experiences.

Chapter Five tells the story of the mentoring program and of the mentors' learning journeys over the three phases of the program. Through narrative, this chapter answers the how and why questions posed earlier in this chapter. The chapter is written as a stage play in three acts with each act corresponding to one of the three phases. The point of this chapter is to convey a holistic interpretation of the case in the form of a reconstructed narrative using multiple voices.

Chapter Six answers these same questions but in a different way. I use the mentoring literature reviewed in Chapter Three to inform a discussion of the difficulties experienced in the mentoring program. To help explain how and why the program evolved in the way it did, I then use the adult learning theories from Chapter Three to reinterpret the narrative from what Bruner (1991) calls a logico–scientific point of view. In Chapter Six, I also reflect on my learnings in doing on-site research with a group of people over a prolonged period of time.

In the final chapter, Chapter Seven, I reflect on what this case study, despite its limitations, contributes to our understanding of traditional formal mentoring programs and of alternate formal peer support learning structures. I also consider the contribution it has made to our understanding of collaborative research. I conclude with the implications that this study may have for workplace professional development and the directions for further research that it suggests.

1.8 By way of summary

In the late twentieth century, the archetypal figure of the mentor leapt from the private domain of the individual to the public arena of the organisation. The platform has been the structured, planned, or facilitated mentoring program. As this thesis shows, the leap has not gone without mishap. What it also shows is that the notion of mentoring has opened up other ways in which colleagues can help one another learn professionally and personally in the workplace. Through ethnographic narrative I tell of the journey of a group of colleagues who discovered ways "to help people grow." In the next chapter I explain why and how I used the metaphor of narrative to make sense of the circumstances, events, and experiences that constituted this case.

Chapter Two

Research as narrative

"Nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do."

Riessman, 1993, p. 2

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I tell of how I wrote this particular story about the ways the mentoring program evolved. The title of the chapter signals that narrative is the main metaphor that shaped the inquiry from its beginnings in the field to the final product which is this text. To more precisely highlight the metaphorical nature of the title, it could have been written as "Research *as if* it were narrative." Narrative refers to the subject of the inquiry; to the method of interpretation I used; to the text I wrote; to how I conceptualised the research experience overall. The title identifies the set of interrelated assumptions and beliefs about human experience and knowledge that underpin the theoretical framework and methodology of this inquiry.

The purpose of this chapter is three-fold. First, I explain what the metaphor of narrative means when applied to the activity of research. I then explain why I chose the metaphor of narrative to shape this particular research experience. Finally, I describe the specific methods used. Because I am starting from the belief that it is through metaphor that we make meaning of experience, I begin with a discussion of metaphor itself.

2.2 What is metaphor?

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 5) explain that metaphor is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." They argue that metaphor is at work both in the experiential and the cognitive domains—it structures experience as it is lived and as it is thought about. Sarbin (1986, p. 4), too, points to the meaning–making capacity of metaphor:

> When a person confronts a novel occurrence for which no ready–made category or class is available, the occurrence remains uninstantiated, unclassified, or unassimilated until a class or category is located or invented. The recognition of partial similarity on some dimension or construct provides the basis for analogy, and if linguistic translation is necessary, the partial

similarity is expressed as metaphor. The novel occurrence is named with the metaphor.

By its very nature, the research enterprise is a particularly fertile ground for metaphor making. Indeed, whilst we may describe research as an investigation, an exploration, or a systematic inquiry aimed at furthering knowledge, we resort to metaphor to explain how it is done. A long list of research concepts and procedures compiled by Richardson (1990, pp. 19–20) provides explicit and implicit examples of the use of metaphor in research practice. Just one set of metaphors commonly used to understand research derives from the imagery associated with light and sight. For example, research has been described "as a 'window' through which we might 'see' and comment" (Miller, 1997, p. 2). The light/sight analogy is also taken up in the title of the book, *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice* (Eisner, 1991). As these examples illustrate, metaphors affect how we conceive the research project, how we position ourselves as researchers, and how we perform the research act. For this thesis I use narrative or story as the main metaphor to help structure and interpret the research experience.

In foregrounding the notion of metaphor in this study, I may be inviting criticism on at least three counts. Some may argue that metaphor is merely a literary device and nothing more; some may argue that using a particular metaphor to shape a piece of research results in certain aspects of the subject of study being ignored; others may argue that the very ambiguity of metaphor inhibits the pursuit of new knowledge. My response to these potential sources of criticism is based on the argument that yes, metaphors do have limitations and ambiguities but we make meaning through metaphor whether we acknowledge the particular metaphors or not (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sarbin, 1986).

Implicit in the first possible criticism—that metaphor is a literary device—is the assumption that rhetoric has no place in the research enterprise. This argument ignores the power of language in the making of meaning. Responses to positivist research paradigms in the social sciences (Atkinson, 1990; Brown, 1992; Clifford & Marcus, 1984; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987; Van Maanen, 1988, 1995) have revealed how "the conventions of text and rhetoric are among the ways in which reality is *constructed*" (Atkinson, 1990, p. 2). Writing, especially research writing, is not about "writing up" findings. Rather, it is a continuation of the process that *constructs* the findings, a point which Richardson highlights when she describes "writing as inquiry" (1994, pp. 516–529). Even if metaphor were "only" rhetoric, it fundamentally shapes the research text.

The second criticism—that metaphor can only provide a partial understanding— is valid. When one subject is described in terms of another, it results in some aspects being revealed and others remaining hidden. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 13) explain that metaphorical structuring can only be partial because "if it were total, one concept would actually *be* the other, not merely be understood in terms of it." Sarbin's (1986, p. 4) analysis of Pepper's (1942) notion of root metaphor also identifies the constraints a particular metaphor imposes on the making of meaning:

> The root metaphor provides the framework for the construing of occurrences in the natural and man-made worlds. The root metaphor constrains the kinds of philosophical or scientific models to be applied either to the task of observing and classifying or to the task of interpreting or explaining. The categories of analysis and the sorts of questions asked are similarly constrained by the choice of root metaphor.

Conceptualising inquiry as if it were narrative then, may be criticised for producing inappropriate analogies and even blind spots. This is a valid concern. Metaphors do delimit but they do this whether we articulate them or not. My purpose in this chapter is to identify the root metaphor I am using and thus to make more explicit the "situational limitations of the knower" (Richardson, 1994, p. 518) that make *all* research partial.

While metaphors restrict interpretation in one sense, they also do the opposite. They offer breadth and depth by providing insight into characteristics that were not previously discernible. The main issue here is the choice of metaphor. What makes a metaphor a good metaphor? Metaphor works because it "exploits simultaneous similarity and difference" (Fiske, 1990, p. 92). But its power to structure experience and the talk about experience lies in what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call the "systematicity" of the metaphorical concept. They use the term "systematicity" to refer to the way in which metaphorical expressions are tied to a metaphorical concept to form a single coherent system of interrelated subcategories. "Research as narrative" for example, produces different associations to "research as a knife," "research as a piece of adhesive tape," or "research as a lens." Each metaphor produces different touchstones for comparison and contrast and a different system of metaphorical entailments. The judgment call needed is to select the best metaphor and the best metaphor is the one whose network of related metaphorical expressions works best for the writer's purpose. In this study I have labelled as narrative that web of metaphors within which the organising, structuring, interpreting, and representation of the research take place. In this web there are notions of plot, character, context, and theme. Undoubtedly other metaphors are also operating, but it is this particular cluster that I wish to deliberately use to integrate the various aspects and processes of the inquiry.

The third criticism—that metaphor is ambiguous—is also valid. Writers use metaphors for different purposes and in different contexts and readers decode them in different ways. For as long as a metaphor is still "live," by which I mean it retains its metaphoric or poetic expression, it is particularly open to multiple meanings. Rather than clarify meaning, metaphors can confuse.

Discourse analysts argue that this slippage in meaning–making is shared by all text because text is based in language, and language as a system of signs is in itself metaphorical. To attempt to fix the meaning of a metaphor is futile. Its usefulness lies in its capacity to generate understanding:

> Textual slippage, disruptions, discontinuities, ambiguities, contradictions, and incompleteness are found everywhere. Reading metaphors as sources of insight and not as structurally fixed and centered provides access to those disruptions and discontinuities and to meanings such as we find them. (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 66)

In this project my "source of insight" is the metaphor of narrative. In the rest of this chapter I discuss what I mean by narrative, the reasons for choosing this particular metaphor, and the ramifications of that choice. Unfortunately, an almost certain consequence of subjecting the metaphor to deconstruction will be a tendency toward its de-metaphorisation. By that I mean the poetic core of the metaphor "research as narrative" risks being hollowed out. However, such a deconstruction is necessary in this research context. The ubiquitous presence of narrative in many research disciplines has me draw on writings in the fields of psychology and literary studies, history and sociology. Recent writings in anthropology on ethnographic representations, in particular, have provided me with a rich source of insights in the use of narrative forms in writing text.

2.3 What is narrative?

Broadly defined, narrative can refer to any written or verbal representation (Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). Fisher's (1992, p. 205) use of the term for example, reflects such an inclusive interpretation:

> When I use the term narration, I have in mind not the specific individuated forms or genre that we call narrative, but a conceptual frame that would account for the "stories" we tell each other – whether such "stories" are in the form of argumentation, narration, exposition, or esthetic writings and performance.

In contrast, Sarbin (1986, p. 3) describes narrative or story more narrowly to mean "a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, a middle, and an ending (or, as Kermode (1967) suggests, the sense of an ending)." In this thesis, I use the term "narrative" in the way Sarbin uses it. By narrative, I mean that organisational scheme we use to make meaning of experience in a story form. Polkinghorne (1988, p. 18) also defines story or narrative in this sense as "a meaning structure that organizes events and human actions into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole."

Everyday life is replete with story–related activities in which people are interpreting other people's stories or constructing their own. We watch, read, and listen to stories unfolding on the television, at the cinema, in the theatre, and in novels and magazines. We tell and retell stories of our experiences and those of others. In the workplace we tell and listen to stories in our offices and staffrooms, at meetings, huddled over the photocopier, in the corridors, and on the telephone and the email. At conferences, we tell stories of different kinds—those in our papers, and those at the dinner table. We tell different versions of the same story to friends, colleagues, bosses, and the family. We tell public stories and personal stories. Questions such as What happened? How did it go? Can you give an example? more often than not invite stories which once told, become the subjects of other stories. We reflect on the stories we tell—we compare stories, we evaluate stories, we judge their plausibility. The human experience of the mentoring program in this study was no different from other human experiences in its capacity to generate stories.

Narrative, according to Polkinghorne (1988, p. 11) is "the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful." Bruner (1991) explains that narrative is one of the two cognitive modes people use to make meaning of experience, with the other being the logico–scientific mode. Like Polkinghorne, Bruner (1991, p. 4) too, notes the ubiquitousness of narrative: "We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing."

To narrativise reality (White, 1987) means to impose on it the form of a story; that is, to make meaning of it *as if* it were a story. Riessman's remark at the beginning of this chapter alerts us to the fact that stories are not to be found in the same way that, say, pebbles or grains of sand are found on a beach. She explains that stories are acts of interpretation that give a particular shape to "disorderly experiences" (1993, p. 26). White (1987, p. 4) also stresses that narratives are creations of the mind when he describes how the past is narrativised in history texts: "Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult." The point here is that despite narrative being the primary way we organise experiences, narratives remain interpretations, and as such, open to contention and revision.

To illustrate the kind of order narrative imposes on reality, Bruner (1986, pp. 11–12) contrasts the narrative cognitive mode to the logico–scientific cognitive mode:

> Each, perhaps, is a specialization or transformation of simple exposition, by which statements of fact are converted into statements implying causality. But

> the types of causality implied in the two modes are palpably different. The term *then* functions differently in the logical proposition "if x, then y" and in the narrative *recit* "The king died, and then the queen died." One leads to a search for universal truth conditions, the other for likely particular connections between two events—mortal grief, suicide, foul play.

Narrative then is not about determining categorically what caused what to happen. It is not about constructing atemporal generalisable truths and it is not about proof. Narrative interpretation is concerned more with plausible reasons for why things happened in a particular way in a particular case.

An essential feature of the causal explanation found in narrative is its temporal dimension. A series of events documented in chronicle form however, does not in itself constitute a narrative. This differentiation is made in historical research by historians who distinguish between the chronicle and the *histoire* (White, 1987). It is also made in literary theory by the Russian formalists who distinguish the *fabula* from the *sjuzhet* (Martin, 1986). All make a similar point. It is the *sjuzhet* and *histoire* that show how the connections between events produce an overall effect or outcome. The way this is done is referred to by psychologists (Bruner, 1986, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986), literary theorists (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966; Todorov, 1977), and historians (White, 1987) alike as "emplotment." Emplotment is essential to narrative.

White (1987, p. 9) describes plot as "a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole." From a literary perspective, Scholes and Kellogg (1966, p. 239) explain that plot is a system of tension and resolution and

> every separable element in a narrative can be said to have its own plot, ... which contributes its bit to the general system. Not only every episode or incident but every paragraph and every sentence has its beginning, middle, and end.

Sarbin (1986, p. 3) contends that central to plot structure are "human predicaments and attempted resolutions." His definition of narrative describes the function of emplotment as the way human motives and explanations transform a series of events into a cohesive whole:

> The narrative is a way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions; it is an achievement that brings together mundane facts and fantastic creations; time and place are incorporated. The narrative allows for the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of happening. (1986, p. 9)

In summary, narrative makes meaning out of experience in a story form and "join[s] everyday actions and events into episodic units" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11). In this research project, I have imposed the story form on—to reuse Riessman's term—my own "disorderly experiences" and those of the participants.

2.4 Research and narrative

Narrative is not new to the field of research. Literary theorists' interest in narrative can be traced back to a treatise on story in Aristotle's *Poetics* written about two thousand three hundred years ago. Writers of case histories and historical studies have also been using narrative techniques for hundreds of years. However, it is only in the last few decades that research disciplines such as sociology (Richardson, 1992; Riessman, 1993), anthropology (E. M. Bruner, 1986; Rosaldo, 1986b), education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986; Cortazzi, 1993; Witherell & Noddings, 1991), and organisational studies (Boje, 1991; Brown, 1998; Boyce, 1995) have accepted narrative as legitimate in inquiry. Martin (1986, p. 7) summarises this shift toward the valuing of narrative in research as follows: "Mimesis and narration have returned from their marginal status as aspects of 'fiction' to inhabit the very centre of other disciplines as modes of explanation necessary for an understanding of life."

The absence of narrative in the social sciences until recent times has been attributed to social scientists valuing and hence adopting methods of inquiry taken from the natural sciences. Rosaldo (1993, p. 128) argues that this has been the case in anthropology:

> Narrative ... has long been suppressed by classic norms of ethnography. In their zeal to become members of a "science", classic writers submitted themselves to the discipline of linguistic asceticism. By their aesthetic standards, "truth" was a manly, serious business; it was earnest, plain, and unadorned, not witty, oblique, and humanly engaging. The followers of classic norms paraded under a banner of objectivism and marched against

such rhetorical modes as moral indignation, chastisement, exhortation, simile, metaphor, and storytelling.

Interest in narrative has indeed coincided and with an interpretive turn which has questioned the philosophical foundations of the logico–scientific way of doing research. Fundamentals placed in doubt have included assumptions about the nature of truth, the authority of the researcher, and the transparency of language (Denzin, 1997; Lather, 1993). Amongst other things, this questioning has led to the (re)discovery of narrative.

In social research narrative can refer to the subject of inquiry, the method of inquiry or to the kind of written text produced. Polkinghorne (1988, p. 162) identifies two broad categories of narrative in research which he calls explanatory narrative and descriptive narrative. This thesis incorporates both kinds of narrative research.

Explanatory narrative research has the researchers construct their own narratives to explain "why something that has involved human actions happened" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 170). Investigative reports, case histories and many historical texts are examples of explanatory narrative research. Descriptive narrative research has the narratives of others—either of individuals or of groups—as the objects of study. Both the content of the narratives and the forms the narratives take can be the subjects of inquiry. The narratives may be personal narratives, individual narratives, collective narratives, or organisational narratives. They may be written or oral, already present in the social group, or co-produced with the researcher.

The metaphor of narrative is implicated in this thesis in three ways. First, the thesis as a text constitutes a piece of explanatory narrative research. Second, to construct that narrative, I drew on the participants' stories of their mentoring experiences and working lives because "investigators do not have direct access to another's experience" (Riessman, 1993, p. 8). In this respect the thesis involves descriptive narrative, in particular, content analysis. This thesis then is my narrative interpretation of my experience and ultimately my interpretation of the participants' interpretations of their experiences. The methodology I used to incorporate both forms of narrative research is discussed in detail in a later section of this chapter.

The third way in which I have used the metaphor of narrative is in the conceptualisation of the research process itself. Packwood and Sikes (1996, p. 337) observe that research papers and reports often depict the process of doing research as if it were a recipe. They argue that a more appropriate metaphor is that of research as narrative. Their choice of metaphor is based on the research endeavour having the same four features identified as common to all narratives (Nash, 1990, p. 131), namely, that

> (i) Narration of any kind involves the recounting and shaping of events...
>
> (ii) Narration has an essential temporal dimension...
>
> (iii) Narrative imposes structure; it connects as well as records...
>
> (iv) Finally, for every narrative there is a narrator.
>
> (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 337)

Like Packwood and Sikes, I have chosen to interpret the research experience in this thesis as narrative and not as recipe. To describe how I went about interpreting research narratively, I shall be referring directly or indirectly to the four elements listed above and to which I add a fifth: research, like other narrative forms, has an audience. Before describing my method of inquiry I explain in the next section how I came to choose the metaphor of narrative.

2.5 Why narrative?

My reasons for choosing narrative as the primary metaphor for making meaning relate to the field experience and to the purpose of the research project. As experience was to reveal, both the case and the research design changed over time. Not only that, the changes to each had an impact on the other. Narrative has the capacity to depict in a coherent way the complex interplay of character, events, contexts and purpose that led to those changes.

The purpose of the research was neither hypothesis testing nor model evaluation. The purpose became trying to understand, in retrospect, why this particular program evolved in the way it did. Because narrative, by definition, is about providing a causal explanation with the benefit of hindsight, it is a method of inquiry that is consistent with the intent of the research.

The purpose of the research was also to add to our existing understanding of workplace mentoring programs and workplace learning. As a case study, much of its value depends on the capacity of the text "to provide opportunity for vicarious experience" (Stake, 1995, p. 86). Narrative can do this especially if it is supported with a "thick description ...[which] gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process" (Denzin, 1994, p. 505). One way people learn is by making generalisations from personal experience or from "vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves" (Stake, 1995, p. 85). To assist readers to arrive at these generalisations, which Stake and Trumbull (1982) call "naturalistic generalisations," Stake advocates a richly detailed narrative representation of the case in which "time, place and person" (1995, p. 87) are emphasised.

In summary, I chose narrative because it was consistent with my purpose and it was also consistent with my lived experience of the mentoring program. To explore the pertinence of narrative to this thesis I now refer to three elements of narrative as meaning–making, namely: narrative as ordering of experience; narrative as retrospective explanation; and narrative as vicarious experience.

2.5.1 Narrative as ordering of experience

Making sense of the research project in story form did not begin with the writing of Chapter One. It began as reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983) in the early stages of the project where meaning–making was happening "on the hoof," which was a term one of our very busy participants used to describe how he reflected on his professional practice.

Metaphor, as was discussed earlier, is a way of making sense of something novel in terms of something familiar. In this study, narrativising has been a way of making sense of a research experience that was new, "disorderly" and disconcerting to me in quite significant ways. First, the research project was not going to plan. Second, the research was taking place "live" in a workplace over a prolonged period and thus subject to unpredictable variables. And third, I was a "live" member of that workplace and I was noticing that my ongoing interactions with participants were blurring the edges of my assigned role of "observer only." My response to these three observations was to document what was happening and to reflect on possible reasons.

My initial intent for the research had been to study the outcomes of the mentoring program and to see how mentoring would help "training *take* in the participants" (my diary). I was especially interested in studying the impact of mentoring on individual professional performance and to explore the causal link between mentoring and change in performance—assuming there was one. This seemed consistent with the company's interest in improving transfer of training to the workplace and it was also compatible with the cognitive psychology perspective that had shaped the professional development program as a whole. It also appealed to me because at the time I saw myself as a practitioner as much as a researcher. I felt that a study that showed how a mentoring program improved training outcomes would be of great interest to training consultants and Human Resources staff.

To pursue this line of inquiry I had intended to use interviews and tests to ascertain change in a predetermined set of variables. The aim was for these data collection points to produce a series of snapshots capturing change at predetermined points approximately six months apart, throughout the duration of the Project. The aim was not to look at what was happening between those points in time. This soon changed when events that were unexpected, at least by me, occurred.

A core assumption of my original research design was that the mentoring program itself would be, by and large, unproblematic. I had assumed that what it means to mentor would be understood by most people, if not by all; that mentors would go ahead and mentor; that mentees would have themselves be mentored; and that ultimately, professional performance would likely change for the better as a result of the mentoring. These were, on the whole, incorrect assumptions.

Within a matter of months of having embarked on the Project, participants were experiencing difficulties with the mentoring arrangements as originally conceptualised. Early interviews indicated that for many no mentoring was happening; and that for some, there was uncertainty about what should be happening. Clearly my intent to explore the impact of mentoring on professional development was going to be a nonsense if mentoring was not happening for most people.

Based on these early findings, my focus changed from any possible impact that mentoring may have been having to the mentoring process itself. This was to prove a very rich area for investigation because instead of abandoning the mentoring program, the mentors decided to take responsibility for it. This had been the intent of the consultants.

In response to the difficulties they were experiencing, the mentors directed their efforts to two interrelated purposes: first, learning how mentoring could be better implemented in their situation and second, learning how they could improve their own mentoring capabilities. Week after week the mentors voluntarily met as a group to talk about their experiences and to discuss improvements to the mentoring arrangements. On Friday afternoons at 2 o'clock, Conference Room No 2 became the place where for one hour, mentors met, reflected, argued, created, and experimented. Thus my original research plan was discarded and the mentors' learning how to mentor became the focus.

The sense of "disorder" to my research produced by the original mentoring arrangements "not taking," was further compounded by the unpredicability involved in implementing an intervention in a real life context. Unlike the controlled conditions of laboratory settings, workplaces and their people are subject to unpredictable change. In this case the massive restructuring of the company and changes in the personal lives of the participants impacted on the participants' professional performance, on their Project participation, and on how the mentoring program was taking shape.

Another source of "disorder" concerned my role in the research project. The project's appeal for me had stemmed from my very strong interest and experience, albeit limited, in professional development. From this project I not only wanted a research outcome, but also a better understanding of, and if the opportunity arose, more experience in adult training. This trainer–researcher tension contributed to shifts in my perspectives throughout the project.

A second tension was the changing nature of my relationships with the participants. The original intent had been to maintain the position of uninvolved observer. Over time this changed for many reasons and the ongoing judgment required on my part was trying to decide for a given situation where I wished to be on the observer–participant continuum.

These major sites of change—the mentoring program, the company, and my role—proved to be rich sites for storying while I was in the field. They continued to be so after the mentoring program ended when the storying became a reflection–on–action (Schon, 1983).

2.5.2 Narrative as retrospective explanation

A fundamental feature of the narrative explanation is that it occurs in retrospect (Polkinghorne, 1988) and this thesis is a reconstruction of what happened to the mentoring program over the eighteen months. The advantage of a retrospective perspective in making meaning of a complex series of related events—which this program was to become—is that it helps the researcher with a rationale for apportioning significance to events and conditions. The researcher is able to then decide what should be included and what should be excluded from the narrative. Rosaldo (1993, p. 132) paraphrases philosopher Gallie's (1964) argument which states that narrative "emphasises retrospective intelligibility by demonstrating how later events were conditioned, occasioned, or facilitated by earlier ones." Put another way, retrospective intelligibility is about assigning importance to events in light of what happened next. In this narrative for example, the significance I placed on events, circumstances, and conversations in Phase Two of the mentoring program was influenced by my knowing what happened in Phase Three.

Another aspect to retrospective reconstruction is that it can occur any number of times. This raises the possibility of different and even conflicting reconstructions of the "same event." I use inverted commas because as Bauman (1986, p. 5) argues, the event does not exist independently of its reconstruction. Bauman draws on the writings of Mink (1978), a philosopher of history, to describe the relationship:

> Events are not the external raw materials out of which narratives are constructed, but rather the reverse: Events are abstractions from narrative. It is the structures of signification in narrative that give coherence to events in our understanding, that enable us to construct in the interdependent process of narration and interpretation a coherent set of interrelationships that we call an "event." (Bauman, 1986, p. 5)

This thesis is my third major retrospective reconstruction of the mentoring program event. The first as I have already mentioned, occurred as the project was unfolding. The second occurred in the co-writing of a paper for a professional journal on the mentoring structures trialled in this program (Balatti, Edwards & Andrew, 1997). The three reconstructions are very different narratives.

Robinson and Hawpe (1986, p. 123) describe the revision of narratives as narrative repair:

> Narrative repair is potentially an unending process. Retrospection, or reminiscing, can be viewed as a process of testing the continued validity of life experience stories. Sometimes new information relevant to an incident is discovered which creates discrepancies in the accepted story, but more often interpretive perspectives change prompting reevaluation of the causal model which organized the original account.

Interpretation then is not only influenced by knowing what happened next and by additional information but also by perspective. In the two earlier narratives I was operating from a problem solving perspective. In the first, the ongoing problem was adapting the research design to the changing nature of the program. In the second, the aim was to search for solutions to the problem of implementing mentoring programs that are effective.

Unlike the previous two cycles of narrative reconstruction, in this third cycle I do not have problem solving as my primary intent. This current cycle of reflection may be likened to Schon's reflection–on–action (1983, 1988). The purpose of this sort of reflection involves questioning implicit assumptions and variables (Argyris & Schon, 1974) that were operating while in the field. It involves "those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciation" (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985, p. 3). I do this by reconstructing the narrative from a perspective that is different from that used in the previous two cycles. Not only is the perspective not primarily problem solving, but it has also been influenced by my present geographical and historical location.

To begin with, the perspective has changed because I am physically and professionally in a different position from where I was during the mentoring program. I'm hundreds of kilometres away from where the fieldwork took place and it's hundreds of days since I was a researcher and participant in the program as well as employee and co-worker. Now I am a researcher only. This translocation in time and space relative to the subject of my inquiry makes things easier for me. The emotional involvement I had in the Project has diminished; the sense of excitement and satisfaction I had felt in seeing promising changes and my bitter disappointment at the program's termination have faded. The more dispassionate gaze of the storyteller in another time and place is now colouring the perspective I bring to this narrative.

My perspective has also been influenced by the literature and theoretical frames that I have brought to this reconstruction. This literature is discussed in the next chapter and mainly concerns organisational mentoring programs and adult learning theories. That a narrative of learning should have emerged from the experience was determined in part by the purpose of the larger research project that incorporated the mentoring program; by the participants' experience; and also in part, by my own professional bias as an educator and facilitator of learning. Some of the learning theory was part of my experience while in the field, but I learnt about the other theories well after the mentoring program ended.

During the fieldwork, I attempted to explain what was happening by using the learning theories and models that informed the Project and which, in fact, were included in the training workshops. These theories focussed on the individual learner. A major source of unease for me had been their limited capacity to adequately explain what I saw happening at the weekly mentor meetings.

It seemed to me—and this was confirmed by the participants themselves—that the weekly mentor meetings were occasions where learning interactions were taking place. Over time the group members worked toward a common understanding of what mentoring meant and their common purpose became finding mentoring options that were viable in the group's unique context. The specific language associated with the concepts and skills presented at the training workshops increasingly became part of the talk around the table. The mentors began forming new relationships and networks amongst themselves and with people outside the mentor group. The single most important characteristic of this learning phenomenon that was not accounted for in the theories I knew about at the time was the centrality of the group to the learning experience.

This was partly resolved well after the termination of the program when, through other research projects, I learnt about theories of learning that are sociologically based. In particular, I was introduced to the notions of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), communities of common purpose (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) and learning communities (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Wenger, 1998) through a six month stay at the Centre of Research and Learning in Regional Australia at the University of Tasmania. In retrospect and from this new perspective, I concluded that what I had been witnessing over the eighteen-month period was a learning community trying to take shape.

2.5.3 Narrative as vicarious experience

Many researchers have been stating what appears to be the obvious and that is that researchers have the responsibility "to assist readers at arriving at high–quality understandings" (Stake, 1995, p. 88). The apparent lack of attention to the reader, has been more bluntly stated by Richardson (1994) who laments that many research texts, in a vain attempt to be "objective," are plain boring. With this thesis, I have taken Stake's advice on the power of narrative to represent case studies. In writing this text as a narrative I have worked with characters, contexts, and time sequences; plots and subplots; themes and subthemes; dialogues and monologues. Throughout the process Richardson (1990, 1992, 1994, 1995) has alerted me to think about the rhetorical choices that I have had to make.

These appeals of Stake (1995), Richardson (1994), and others come at a time when the social sciences have been experiencing what Denzin (1994, p. 501) calls an "interpretive crisis." It is a crisis because the traditionally accepted "correct" ways of writing texts no longer hold the authority they once enjoyed. Representations are now seen as political and poetical textual reconstructions of experience whether they are acknowledged to be so by the author or not. This not only implies that there is no such thing as the one "true" story in research text, but that all stories are a rhetorical production.

This moment in research has produced renewed interest in writing strategies (Richardson, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995) and all forms of rhetoric (Nelson, Megill & McCloskey, 1987; Simons, 1989). For example, narrative forms using different literary and rhetorical devices (Atkinson, 1990; Denzin, 1997; Rosaldo, 1986a, 1986b; Van Maanen, 1988, 1995) are being used and written about in anthropology and sociology especially in studies of lived experience (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). Ethnographers (Denzin, 1997) in particular have experimented with different representations and the traditional realist tales and confessional tales of the field have been joined by dramatic ethnography, critical ethnography and auto-ethnographies (Van Maanen, 1988, 1995). Reflecting the mixed genre status of many recent texts, this thesis has many elements of Van Maanen's tales.

Issues of voice and authority have become central to the interpretive crisis. Richardson (1990, p. 12) argues that writers such as myself are now needing to make conscious choices about how the author's voice, the voices of the participants, and the mutivoicedness of both are heard in the text:

> When we write social science, we are using our authority and privileges to tell about the people we study.... No matter how we stage the text, we—as authors—are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values.

The interdependent nature of experience and representation is also at the heart of how narrative makes meaning. Narrative describes the process of storying and the product or the representation of storying, that is, the story. Bruner (1991, p. 5) argues that narrative both constitutes and represents reality and the two processes cannot be teased apart:

> As with all accounts of forms of representation of the world, I shall have a great difficulty in distinguishing what may be called the narrative mode of thought from the forms of narrative discourse. As with all prosthetic devices, each enables and gives form to the other, just as the structure of language and the structure of thought eventually become inextricable.

Crafting this narrative has alerted me to the ways in which different constructions and rhetorical devices help define the relationships between what Clandinin and Connelly (1994) call the research text and the field text. Making choices about voice—authorial voice, participant voice, direct and indirect speech, point of view; about temporal organisation—flashbacks, flashforwards, eliding of time; and about metanarration—exposition and description, has made the writing of this narrative a very exciting and difficult part of my work. It has also encouraged me to use different representational forms to better convey my intent.

Stake's (1994, 1995) recommendation to use narrative to help readers make naturalistic generalisations involved making choices concerning both content and form. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 423) summarise the challenge to the researcher when making choices about representation as follows:

> One struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices.

In the next section, I discuss the choices I made as a consequence of having selected narrative as the root metaphor for structuring the research experience.

2.6 Narrative production

A specific metaphoric structure influences how the research process is conducted at every level of social scientific reasoning (Richardson, 1994). In this case, the metaphor of narrative has influenced the observations and text that have entered my data pool; the subset of data that was selected from this pool; the ways I have interpreted this data to the exclusion of other possible interpretations; and the text I have written. All along the way I have been making value judgments because "'sense making' is always value constituting—making sense in a particular way, privileging one ordering of the 'facts' over others" (Richardson, 1994, p. 520). In this section I make explicit as many as possible of those judgments and choices that significantly helped shape the various stages of this thesis production.

I liken the stages of thesis production to the three elements that Bauman (1986) identifies in oral narrative production, namely: the narrated event, the narrative text, and the narrative event. These same three elements are evident in the narrative production of this thesis. The narrated event is the experiences of the participants and myself in the eighteen month long mentoring program; the narrative text is the story written on these pages; and the narrative event is the reading of the text.

Although a chronological linearity appears to exist in going from the narrated event, to the narrative text, and then to the narrative event, Bauman stresses that the three elements are mutually constituting. I found this indeed to be the case in the production of this thesis. How I reconstructed the narrated event was influenced by the writing of the text and by anticipating a particular readership. I begin with the choices and judgments made that influenced my field experience.

2.6.1 The narrated event: The field experience

The study for me began when the government funding had already been won for the joint university and industry project and I had been appointed as the on-site research officer. This meant I had had no input in the funding application stage of the Project and hence no involvement in either the initial discussions between the research team and company management or in the conceptualisation of the original research design. My first contact with the future participants in the Project was at an information and promotion meeting prior to the first set of training workshops. Two of the three Chief Investigators discussed the Project with potentially interested staff members and spoke at length of another mining-related site where they had conducted a similar professional development program that had been most successful.

In my role as the on-site researcher I worked at the refinery for 2–3 days a week and I was paid by the company. As a newcomer to the company, I was made to feel very welcome by management and staff. Participants learnt about my role at their first training workshops where it was outlined to them by the Chief Investigators. My job was to collect data for the Project as a whole and to give help to anyone who requested it.

Because I wished to do a PhD on the mentoring program, responsibilities concerning that part of the Project were mine. These were to include: assisting in the formal training workshops; interviewing; attending the meetings held by mentors; attending other project related activities such as on-site presentations given by the participants themselves; being available to participants to discuss any mentoring-related issues; and generally developing a sense of what it was like to be part of the refinery community.

During this time I was also the link between the copper refinery and the rest of the research team to which I reported regularly.

Most of my time at the refinery was spent data gathering and interpreting that data. Implicit in the terms "data collecting" or "data gathering" is the assumption that data is ready made "as if it were like ripe fruit waiting to be picked" (E. M. Bruner, 1986, p. 141). Rejecting this assumption, Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 422) prefer to call data "field text" thus underscoring that they are "constructed representations of experience." I would like to think of my data gathering as part of the process of story production.

The interactions I had with participants in the corridors, the canteen, or in the crib rooms; in the car park or at the gate; in their office or my office; and in the library, the training rooms or the conference rooms were story-making opportunities. They held the possibility for both story telling and storying. Story telling was mainly done by the participants, but not always, and storying was a process that was available to us both in making sense of our experiences.

One major source of story making opportunities was meetings and another source was interviews. With the participants' permission, all the mentor group meetings and a selection of the other meetings were taped as were all the interviews. The interviews were fully transcribed by transcribers and the meetings were partially transcribed by me. Whilst the interviews were requested by me to meet my needs as the researcher, the meetings were part of the normal activity participants engaged in as part of the mentoring program. At these meetings I was present either as an observer or participant.

Meetings called by the mentors became an established practice at the plant. Most of the data for the main story of this thesis come out of the meetings that the mentors decided to have as a group on a regular basis. For the first two phases these meetings were weekly and in the last phase, fortnightly. My participation at these meetings in the first phase and most of the second was minimal. My contribution to these meetings was a regular report on the research component of the project and any clarifications requested. Towards the end of the second phase and in the third phase I became more involved in the meetings.

As well as the mentor group meetings, there were mentor facilitated ALE support group (ASG) meetings for the participants. Mentors also conducted several lunchtime learning workshops during the program for project participants and anyone else interested from the plant. I attended some of the ASG meetings and all the learning workshops. Most of these were taped but the data are not used here because they are not relevant to the scope of this study.

Interviews were another important source of data for two reasons. Because mentoring is about special kinds of interactions between people that are sometimes public but often private, and sometimes planned but more often spontaneous, it was neither desirable nor practical for me to "sit in" on mentoring sessions between dyads. Some of these interactions were taped, but they are not used in this thesis because the participants were very conscious of the tape recorder and the dialogue is full of references to the machine. My interpretation of what mentoring meant to the participants of the project is therefore based principally on the recounting of their experiences in the interviews and on the stories mentors told at their meetings.

The interviews with the mentors served another purpose. As well as talking about the specific mentoring arrangements in which they were involved I would also ask the mentors at the interviews about the mentor meetings and about their perceptions of the program overall. Although I was witnessing first hand the mentor meetings, I wanted to know the mentors' personal interpretations of these events as a way of seeking multiple viewpoints and also to inform my own interpretation. It was important to seek the mentors' considered reflections on what was happening at these sessions and the interview setting gave us uninterrupted time on a one-to-one basis to do that. I also expected that what mentors would say in the private confidential space of the interview would possibly be different from what they would say in the public forum. In a few cases, this proved to be so.

I met with participants twice in every phase for formal interviews—a progress interview part way through each phase and an interview at the end, close to the agreed date of completion of their action learning projects or ALEs. The interviews about the mentoring were almost always part of the interview concerning the ALE projects themselves. Depending on the participant, the mentoring component could be as short as five minutes or as long as two hours. In addition to these interviews, I also had lengthy preliminary interviews with all the mentors before their involvement in the project commenced. The purpose of these interviews was for mentors to talk about the experiences and beliefs concerning mentoring that they were bringing to this program. These interviews were initially intended to provide baseline data for monitoring change in mentoring skills and attitudes. However, they were to become more useful in helping me understand why most mentors found mentoring in the context of this particular professional development project so different from their existing experience and knowledge of mentoring.

One of the benefits of interviewing participants several times over the eighteen-month period was that their perspectives often altered. I had the opportunity to hear potentially different interpretations of earlier mentoring arrangements and I encouraged this by inviting participants to reflect on their past experiences in the program as well as on the current mentoring arrangements. The ongoing "narrative repair" (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p. 123) provided a richness and a multi-layered texture to the data that would not have been achieved by the more common research method of a pre- and post- interview.

Much has been written about research interviewing and interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Measor, 1985; Mishler, 1986; Spradley, 1979; Seidman, 1991). Issues such as questioning techniques, relationship between interviewer and interviewee, the social, cultural, and political context of interview, and interviewer and interviewee's perceptions and expectations of the interview context have been explored. Central to most of the literature is the belief that the interview displays the same dimensions as any other speech event or activity. Mishler's (1986, p. 35) discussion of research interviewing for example, draws on Gumperz's (1982, p. 166) definition of a speech activity which he cites:

> [A speech activity is] a set of social relationships enacted about a set of schemata in relation to some communicative goal.... [It implies] certain expectancies about thematic progression, turn taking rules, form, and outcome of the interaction as well as constraints on context.

As my social relationships with most of the participants changed over the eighteen months, the interview as a speech event also changed. A number of factors contributed to these changes including improvement in my skills, the participants' perceptions of the Project in general and the developing trust and rapport in my relationships with the participants. In the early stages, the interview was a structured interview with most questions being procedural, seeking information about frequency of mentoring interactions and outcomes of those interactions. As time progressed and I became aware that evaluating mentoring outcomes wasn't going to be my primary focus, the interview became less structured. In some cases, it approached the flow of a "normal" conversation where questions were asked by both the interviewee and the interviewer and topics for discussion emerged from the conversation rather than being introduced from an interview schedule. For some participants, the interview became a vehicle for reflection on their mentoring relationships and the mentoring program in general. Those participants told me that they looked forward to their interviews for that reason. As I became more skilled as an interviewer, I became aware that the richest data were prompted by open-ended questions that provided the space for the participants to reflect on their experience and tell stories. My emphasis therefore changed to in–depth interviewing where the purpose is "in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1991, p. 3).

In addition to the meetings and the interviews, other data were generated or collected. Written summaries of training sessions (all taped) and training-related documents; agendas, minutes, and other documents relating to participant meetings; reports produced by me or in collaboration with the company coordinator of the project; and literature produced by the company all contributed to the story making. Upon the suggestion of the trainers some participants maintained journals to which I had access, so these, too, became part of the pool. I also maintained a journal in which I wrote impressions, meetings outcomes, small summaries, stories, reflections, and observations.

Some data were generated in more ad hoc ways and as needed. One example was when I wanted to explore a hunch. When participants reported dissatisfaction with the mentoring arrangements in the first phase, I considered the possibility that part of the problem may have rested with the training workshops. Consequently, I prepared a satisfaction questionnaire on the training which the mentors completed at their workshop at the beginning of the second phase. Results from the written questionnaire did not support my hunch. Participants, both new ones and those who had been mentors from the beginning of the program, reported that they had been very satisfied with the training.

Another example of unplanned data collection was the taped mentoring sessions that I had with two participants—a metallurgist and a computer programmer. One was a mentor in the program while the other was a participant who had been dissatisfied with his mentoring arrangements. Both people said they approached me to be their mentor because they had found the interviews very useful and wished to have similar sessions on a more regular basis. These data are not used directly in this thesis and the tapes, to date, have not been transcribed. However, this personal experience needs to be acknowledged because the insights I gained in my formal mentoring role have contributed to how I interpreted the participants' stories of their own mentoring experiences.

2.6.2 The narrative text: The thesis

By the end of the eighteen months I was in the (un)enviable position of having literally hundreds of tapes, most of them transcribed, agendas and meeting minutes of almost every mentor meeting, written reflections, and other miscellaneous written and spoken data. To explain how I went about choosing which stories from the field I would write into the text and which I'd omit, I will now discuss how I assigned importance or significance to them.

As I have already mentioned, the process of storying began with the first interactions between the participants and me. As time progressed, I encountered what Agar (1996, p. 31) refers to as "rich points" in the data which are events or perceptions that were unexpected. I recorded in my diary what these rich points were and the unresolved issues that they raised. From these impressions, came the prototypes of the research questions in Chapter One. As a result of reading and re-reading the data and through the process of writing, these questions have been subjected to constant revision.

One was an incident that occurred by accident when a mentee read about herself in a misplaced set of mentor meeting minutes. The other, which happened soon after but was unrelated to the first incident, was a "reported" incident where the mentor group had been described by a non-mentor as a "secret society." Both incidents were unintended and unexpected. They were also highly contextual, born out of a unique set of circumstances and thus part of the unique narrative of this company's experience. Their consequences however, were transformational. The combined response by the mentors to these incidents contributed to a major shift in the way they constructed their talk and their activity. Names were no longer used in the minutes and the meetings eventually became open meetings. In this respect, both incidents were critical incidents and thus are eligible for inclusion in the narrative.

The second kind of incident that Tripp (1993) says can be made critical is the commonplace or the non-event. These incidents can be made critical through analysis if "they are indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures" (p. 25). Incidents of this kind are also included in this narrative. One example is the many discussions held at mentor meetings which, according to the participants themselves, were time consuming and nonproductive.

How both kinds of incidents are interpreted and linked to form a coherent story is through emplotment. Todorov's (1977, p. 111) structuralist description of the plot found in literature also describes in many ways the plot I constructed in this narrative:

> The minimal complete plot consists in the passage from one equilibrium to another. An "ideal" narrative begins with a stable situation which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical.
>
> Consequently there are two types of episodes in a narrative: those which describe a state (of equilibrium or of disequilibrium) and those which describe the passage from one state to the other. The first type will be relatively static and, one might say, iterative; the same kind of actions can be repeated indefinitely. The second, on the other hand, will be dynamic and in principle occurs only once.

The plot in this narrative weaves the critical incidents that have obvious consequences with the commonplace incidents of no apparent consequence to produce the flow from equilibrium to disequilibrium and back to equilibrium that is of a different kind to the one before.

In many ways, the requirements of a thesis have shaped the flow of this narrative which further supports Bauman's (1986) theory that the three elements of narrative production are mutually defining. For example, there are the chapters that parallel the methodology, literature review, and analysis chapters of the standard thesis format.

The narrative has also been shaped by constraints imposed by the research methodology. In comparison to the plots found in many novels or theatrical works in the realism tradition where personalities and motives of characters play an important part, the emplotment of this narrative is almost devoid of characterisation. This is so despite my acknowledging that personalities, motives, and personal contexts of individuals did contribute to how the story unfolded.

Everyday experience, as well as literary theory and psychology, points to the importance of character in the development of plot. Comments in interviews suggested that the way the mentoring program was developing was being influenced by the people involved. For example, in one interview I was discussing staff participation in the mentoring program with a mentor who had worked on the plant for more than 25 years. The mentor attributed responsiveness to the program to character traits and argued that, from experience, he could confidently say that, "if you've got a good bloke it doesn't really matter what sort of initiative you implement he will make it work." Such a comment may also have been saying much about his own personality.

This thesis has minimal character representation and participants' involvement in events is depicted with as little reference as possible to personality traits. Also almost completely absent in this narrative reconstruction is characterisation in terms of participants' biographies and the personal contexts in which they were operating. Because the mentoring program was occurring for participants in the same slice of time as other events—births, deaths, marriages, affairs, divorces, work stress, promotions, job uncertainty—it is possible that these other aspects of the participants' lives were impacting on their mentoring experience. In fact, some participants would speak in interviews about these things and explain how their participation was being influenced by personal circumstances. For others who did not talk to me about personal matters, I sometimes had second-hand information. In any event, biographies and personal contexts, too, have been excluded from the narrative.

In this respect, the lack of characterisation has produced an impoverished narrative especially when compared with the richly crafted narratives found in literature or even in some ethnographic texts. The reasons for the exclusion of characterisation concern my relationship with the participants, the research design, and my perspective. The agreement signed by participants promised confidentiality and as much as possible, anonymity. Consequently, apart from some exceptions such as the project coordinator whose permission I sought, I have no intention for participants to be identifiable in this thesis. To further disguise identity, the voices heard in the narrative are attributed to a small number of people and they have been given pseudonyms. For the reader, this has the additional benefit of not having to keep track of over forty characters.

My intent is not for the reader to establish who said what. My intent is to convey the sense of movement and mood that existed within the group over time. The exploration of the relationship between personality types and plot and the intersection between the personal and the public domains of the participants' lives were not part of my research design. The theoretical frameworks were not there and neither were the appropriate data collection methods.

Working within the constraints of the research methodology, I have written a thesis that, in effect, is a prose narrative in which a second narrative, a stage play, is embedded. From Chapter One to Chapter Seven, the final chapter, I have developed a sense of story to the text by attending to the detail of "time, place and person" that Stake (1995, p. 87) stresses in narrative construction.

What I wish to discuss now is Chapter Five, the stage play that portrays what happened over the three phases in the evolution of the mentoring program. In this representation, I have construed the mentoring program as an arena where different social dramas between mentor and mentor, mentor and mentee, researcher and participant were played out. I use devices found in the ethnographic genre variously called performance text, ethnoperformance, or ethnodrama (Denzin, 1997, pp. 90–125; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Paget, 1990). Performance text is a way "of shaping an experience without losing the experience; it can blend realist, fictional, and poetic techniques; it can reconstruct the 'sense' of an event from multiple 'as–lived' perspectives; and it can give voice to what is unspoken, but present" (Richardson, 1994, p. 522).

The stage play in Chapter Five consists of three acts and a coda. Each act portrays a review by the participants of their experience in the three phases. The participants are collected in different configurations on stage with some wanting to tell the audience what happened and others remaining silent. The mentors, the mentees, the narrator, and I contribute to the review. In the main, the actors speak directly to the audience but flashbacks are also used. The dialogue is directly extracted from the transcripts, meeting minutes and agendas, and from journals that participants and I kept. In the case of the narrator, the script is either direct dialogue from the mentor meetings or the paraphrasing of such dialogue. New sentences, phrases, or words are used as sparingly as possible and only for the purposes of creating linkages.

Elements of performance text can include narrators, shifting points of view, action, multiple voices, and dramatic scripts. Chapter Five employs all these rhetorical devices. Two such devices are the collective mentor story and the narrator who tells it. The narrator is an "imaginary" mentor who was involved in the program from its inception. With the help of flashbacks, he—a male narrator seemed appropriate given that there had been only one female mentor—tells the story of the mentor group across the first two acts. (The third act did not require a narrator.) Clearly, neither the collective mentor story nor the narrator "really" existed. However, they are useful devices for a number of reasons. As well as providing the "voice" that presents the main storyline of the narrative, the narrator also compresses the time between the critical incidents that constitute the main story. In addition, the narrator allows me to convey textually the centrality of the mentor group in this study by making their story distinct from the mentees and from mine as that of the researcher. Other devices are also used and they are explained at the beginning of each act in Chapter Five.

I chose performance text to narrate the story of the evolution of the mentoring program for reasons that at first glance appear contradictory. On the one hand, I chose a stage play because it conveys a sense of realism that prose could not. A stage play in which I give voice to the men and women involved in the program invokes the immediacy of their lived experience. Rather than my telling the readers about their efforts, I want the readers to hear about them directly from the participants themselves, or better still, to have them vicariously experience their disappointments and achievements. Through narration and flashbacks, I want to convey a reality I experienced in being with these people; a reality of trial and error, frustration and good humour, successes and failures. My desire to represent the story in this form has also been fuelled by the distinct lack of representation of participants' lived experience in the case studies found in the literature.

On the other hand, the stage play communicates a sense of contrivedness which is also part of the reality I wish to portray. At one level, I want to convey the contrivedness or artificiality implicit in facilitated mentoring programs because they attempt to manufacture a natural occurring relationship in an unnatural context. One example of how I attempt to do this is a dialogue (produced with extracts from interview transcripts) between a mentor and mentee about their mentoring relationship. Although the two scripts mesh, the two characters do not talk to each other at all—they talk to the audience.

At another level, the contrivedness I wish to convey is that which is found in the very nature of the research process. The narrative reconstructed here is not "what really happened" because no text can do that. The narrative is an imagined depiction of what happened using particular rhetorical devices, data, and interpretive perspectives. By representing the mentoring experience as a stage play I am stressing the melding of the imagined and the "factual"—whatever that may be.

2.6.3 The narrative event: The reading

The narrative event concludes Bauman's model of narrative production. This is where the narrative text is performed for an audience and "is thus laid open to evaluation for the way it is done" (1986, p. 3). As this thesis is a written text, it is the readers who are the audience that participates in what Bahktin calls "the event of narration" (quoted in Bauman, 1986, p. 112).

The interrelationships between narrated event, narrative text, and narrative event are clearly evident in thesis production. The content and form of the narrative text is especially influenced by anticipating the readers in the narrative event to be academic researchers. In this section I outline some of the frames that I anticipate my intended readers may apply in their evaluation of this text.

To begin, this thesis is both a piece of research and a story. Because each is infused with the other, the set of criteria that this thesis should meet includes criteria for evaluating a piece of qualitative research as well as criteria for judging a narrative.

First and foremost it is important to note the criteria against which the adequacy of a story is to be judged are not those used to judge an argument. Again, through contrasting the two modes of thinking—the narrative cognitive mode and the logico-scientific cognitive mode—Bruner (1986, p. 14) explains:

> Physics must eventuate in predicting something that is testably right, however much it may speculate. Stories have not such need for testability. Believability in a story is of a different order than the believability of even the speculative parts of physical theory. If we apply Popper's criterion of falsifiability to a story as a test of its goodness, we are guilty of misplaced verification.

Robinson and Hawpe (1986, p. 124) make the additional distinction that because narratives are retrospective reconstructions, they cannot predict and "cannot be tested like hypotheses because authentic events cannot be replicated under controlled conditions." Narrative has its own set of criteria for well-formedness and people have developed both formal and informal ways "of evaluating the completeness, coherence, plausibility, and applicability of any story" (p. 123).

Stories, Robinson and Hawpe argue, fail for two reasons: either "they are incomplete, that is, they lack some essential information, or ... they are unconvincing, that is, the causal model is inappropriate.... The major test of a story is its acceptance by others" (1986, p. 121). Bruner (1986, p. 11) sums up the difference between the criteria for well–formedness of the story as opposed to the argument as follows:

> A good story and a well–formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical proof. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude.

"Acceptance by others" and "verisimilitude" however need further qualification. We need to ask: Acceptance by which others? Verisimilitude for whom and from what perspective? Sarbin (1986, pp. 7–8) speaks to this issue when pondering the relationship between truth and fiction in novels and in historical writings:

> The novelist writes about fictive characters in a context of real world settings; the historian writes about presumably actual events, populated by reconstructed people, the reconstruction being carried out through the use of imagination. Both kinds of narrativists make use of so–called "facts" and "fictions." The historian aims at historical truth, the novelist at narrative truth.

So what sort of truth does the researcher who constructs research as narrative aim at? What narrative contract (Atkinson, 1990, p. 71) does she enter into with her reader? How is it determined that the contract has been fulfilled? I am neither novelist nor historian yet in some respects, I am both. Despite a certain overlap, the criteria for a good story in a novel, in a theatrical performance form, in a piece of historical writing and in a piece of qualitative research have to be different. Knowing which readers we are writing for, or to which listeners we are telling a story, influences how we go about creating the effect of verisimilitude. In my attempt to answer these questions, I begin with Denzin's notion of interpretive community (1994) and then refer to his discussion on verisimilitude (1997) and that of Atkinson (1990).

Within the large social group of researchers, Denzin explains that there are interpretive communities. These are subsets of researchers who, through some form of consensus, have established what they consider good research to be. This includes guidelines for issues of "writing, description, inscription, interpretation, understanding, representation, legitimation, textual desire, and the logic and politics of text" (Denzin, 1994, p. 511). It would seem helpful then to identify the particular interpretive community for which I am writing in order to determine how to convey the appropriate sense of verisimilitude. The difficulty however is in identifying interpretive communities as distinctly different groups. Denzin illustrates the difficulty by attempting to characterise just two broad interpretive communities for which he uses the borrowed terms of the "Tender–minded" and the "Tough–minded" (Table 2.1). As quickly as he presents this classification, Denzin (1994, p. 512) critiques it as being simplistic: "Any given qualitative researcher–as–bricoleur can be more than one thing at the same time, can be fitted into both the tender– and the tough–minded categories."

Table 2.1. Characteristics of two interpretive communities (Denzin, 1994, p. 511)

Tender–minded	Tough–minded
Intuitive	Hard–nosed empiricists
Emotional	Rational, cognitive
Open–ended texts	Closed texts, systems
Interpretation as art	Interpretation as method
Personal biases	Neutrality
Experimental texts	Traditional texts
Antirealism	Realist texts
Antifoundational	Foundational
Criticism	Substantive theory
Science–as–power	Good science canons
Multivoiced texts	Single–voiced texts

This situation applies to this study because it too, displays elements from both groups. It's empirically based but epistemologically it takes an anti-foundational position; the text combines the realist tale with more experimental literary genres; it acknowledges both the rational and the emotional aspects to human experience. Hence the interpretive community for which it is written is not clear cut except to say that it is written for the qualitative researcher who accepts that ethnographic narrative as a methodology provides valuable insights into mentoring and more generally, learning in the workplace. It is this reader that the text aims to persuade of its verisimilitude or plausibility.

To explain how research text, in particular how ethnographic text, projects authority and legitimacy by conveying its own sense of verisimilitude, both Atkinson (1990) and Denzin (1994, 1997) draw on the work of literary theorists Culler (1975) and Todorov (1977). Atkinson and Denzin argue that versimilitude is multi-layered and the extent to which the research text succeeds is determined by how it addresses the same three aspects of the reading experience that Culler and Todorov identify in the reading of literary texts:

> First, there is the relation between the given text and "public opinion"; second, there is the text's degree of correspondence to the expectations of a given genre; third, there is the extent to which the text masks its own textual conventions, appearing to conform to a "reality." (Atkinson, 1990, p. 39)

The hope that I have for this thesis then is that the narrative persuades the reader that it is plausible; that it meets the requirements of what constitutes good qualitative research; and it succeeds in having readers vicariously experience the depth of rational and emotional engagement that the people in this study experienced in their commitment to learning to help others learn.

In the final analysis however, Denzin (1997, pp. 12–13) warns that the relationship between verisimilitude and truth in qualitative research is a "messy" one:

> Challenges to verisimilitude in qualitative research rest on the simple observation that a text is always a site of political struggle over the real and its meanings. Truth is political, and verisimilitude is textual. The meaning of each of these terms is not in the text but rather brought to it by the reader. Here is the dilemma. Ethnographers can only produce messy texts that have some degree of verisimilitude; that is, texts that allow readers to imaginatively feel their way into the experiences that are being described by the author.... Little more can be sought.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained why and how the root metaphor of narrative has shaped this thesis in a number of ways. First, I am taking up Packwood and Sikes' (1996) metaphor of "research as narrative" to mean that within the narrative of the evolution of the mentoring program I also weave the related story of how the research design and my participation changed. Second, in having narrative as my method of inquiry, I am interpreting participant narratives from the field as well as my own. Finally, in writing the case study itself in this particular narrative form, I am conveying simultaneously a sense of contrivedness and a sense of realism. The sense of contrivedness comes from having imposed the story form on the experience in the first place and the sense of realism comes from using thick description, plot, multiple voices and dialogue directly extracted from the recorded conversations or transcripts.

In this chapter, the chronological dimension has been defined as a key feature of narrative. But as well as a story unfolding over time, it unfolds in a space—a physical, social, cultural, political, economic, and historical space. As Stake (1994, p. 239) reminds us, a case has "its own unique history, ... a complex entity operating within a number of contexts, including the physical, economic, ethical, and aesthetic." For this reason, the following two chapters are context setting. In the next chapter, the narrative is set in the research context constructed from the literature review and in the subsequent chapter it is set in the immediate contexts of the company and the professional development project. Both chapters contribute to understanding the point of the story.

Chapter Three

Literature review

"Learning cannot be designed: it can only be designed *for*
—that is facilitated or frustrated."

Wenger, 1998, p. 229

3.1 Introduction

Because the narrative that begins with the next chapter is about co-workers learning to help one another learn, the purpose of this chapter is two-fold. In the first half of the chapter, I review the literature on workplace mentoring programs. This provides a context for understanding the points of similarity and of difference between this case and other workplace mentoring programs. In the second half of the chapter I develop a context for interpreting the narrative as one of learning.

The review explores different interpretations of workplace mentoring and the factors that influence the success of mentoring programs. It also examines the value of mentoring programs to organisations in terms of human capital and social capital. The value that employees have to an organisation has traditionally been recognised in terms of human or intellectual capital. This refers to the skills, knowledge, and know-how that the workforce possesses. In the last decade, attention has been directed toward the value of another form of organisational capital called social capital. Social capital refers to the norms, networks, and trust which Robert Putnam (1995, online) identifies as the "features of social life ... that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives." By definition, mentoring programs can change both the human capital and the social capital of an organisation because they are about establishing new relationships and networks within the organisation for the purposes of increasing knowledge and skills.

By necessity, the review of the mentoring literature in this chapter is limited in scope. The increase in the literature in recent years has been explosive with writings in the fields of education, health, and industry being some of the most prolific. These writings indicate that mentoring programs are being implemented for a broadening spectrum of purposes. While career development continues to be a very common objective of mentoring programs, formal mentoring has also been coopted for other purposes. Included amongst these is the use of mentoring as a strategy in organisations' planned learning responses to change (Caldwell & Carter, 1993a; Lewis, 1996). It is being used to help individuals learn to respond positively to existing, desired, or imminent changes at organisational, team, and specific job levels. In these mentoring programs, improving current professional performance has replaced career advancement as the focus. The program in this study was of this kind. Consequently this review is biased toward the literature on workplace mentoring programs that are designed to help people improve the way they do their job.

In the second half of the chapter I describe the adult learning theories and models I used to help understand how the mentoring program evolved. The first two models discussed are Butler's (1994) model of human action and change and Benner's (1984, Benner, Tanner, & Chesla, 1995) model of skill acquisition. Butler's model identifies the five elements involved in transformational learning with reflection being the most critical. Benner's model, which is based on Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1986) work, describes the five stages in skill development beginning with the novice stage and progressing to that of expert.

In contrast to Butler's and Benner's work which focuses on the individual, the second set of theories, with which I conclude the chapter, has the group as its starting point. The dominant metaphor I came to use to interpret how the participant group interacted and the import of those ways was that of "community." Here I discuss the notions of a "community of practice" and a "learning community" (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Wenger, 1998). A related concept is a special kind of learning community found in organisations called a "parallel learning set" or "practice field" (Kofman & Senge, 1993; Schein, 1993). I include it here because of its relevance to understanding peer learning support systems such as the one that developed in this case.

The first aim of this chapter therefore is to provide a context for understanding how this particular mentoring program is positioned in the field of formal mentoring. The second aim is to set the context for reading the narrative as a story of adults learning to help one another learn in a formal peer support system.

3.2 Mentoring in the workplace

As I have already mentioned in the previous two chapters, the mentors in this program did not come to a ready agreement about their role as mentors or even about what mentoring meant in the context of the Project. Part of the difficulty lies in the elusiveness of a definition of mentoring that has universal acceptance. Gibb (1999) argues that a term that can refer to anything ranging from coaching to an intense emotional relationship in which the mentee undergoes personal transformation, risks causing role confusion for prospective mentors. In fact, Gibb states a view shared by many others (e.g., Clutterbuck, 1991; Murray, 1991) that clarity of role definition for both mentors and mentees is essential to the success of any formal mentoring program. Yet the problem remains that within the literature there is no apparent consensus regarding the role of the mentor.

This section identifies in the literature overlapping categories of interpretations of what makes a mentoring relationship. There are those interpretations that are based on the "ideal" mentoring relationship. There are those that identify the mentee's career development as the raison d'être for the relationship. There are those where we see mentoring essentially being equated to forms of guided learning. Cutting across these categories are experiences of informal or naturally occurring mentoring and formal mentoring. All these interpretations may co-exist, albeit unhappily, within the same organisation and thus contribute to the confusion that Gibb describes.

3.2.1 Mentoring as an ideal

Traditionally, the origins of the mentoring relationship have been attributed to Homer. In the eighth century B.C., Homer immortalised the term "Mentor" in his epic poem *The Odyssey* (n.d./1967) as the name of one of its characters. To search for the roots of the mentor persona with its variants as it is constructed in the mentoring literature of today, Roberts and Chernopiskaya (1999) have argued that one is not to look to the Mentor in Homer's poem at all. Rather, its genesis is in the characterisation of another Mentor found in a book written over two thousand years later by a French mystic, religious writer, and educator called Francois de Salignac de la Mothe-Fenelon. Fenelon was tutor to Louis XIV's grandson who was heir apparent to the throne. He wrote the book *Les Adventures de Telemaque* as a novel of instruction for his fourteen-year-old charge with no intention of seeking a wider audience. Nevertheless, it was published in the late 1600s or early 1700s and became the most reprinted book in the 18th century. According to Anderson and Shannon, and Clarke as well (1995, 1984 cited in Roberts & Chernopiskaya, 1999), this publication was responsible for introducing the word "mentor" into the French and English languages. It entered these languages as a common noun in the first half of the 18th century with the Oxford Dictionary recording its first use in English in 1750.

Fenelon's book was written as an imitation of Homer's poem and "pedagogues of every sort found the book a god-send" (Clarke, 1984 cited in Roberts & Chernopiskaya, 1999). In contrast to Homer's Mentor who had a secondary and underdeveloped role in the poem, Fenelon's Mentor was not only well developed, but it was crafted by an educator. Roberts and Chernopiskaya (p. 84) argue that it was Fenelon's Mentor and not Homer's who would "counsel, guide, nurture, advise, and enable." It is plausible then that our notion of the mentor relationship as a developmental and learning one derives from this heritage. It is also important to note that Mentor was a fictional character in both literary works with there being no reason for the reader to assume that the character was based on fact. The point here is that perhaps the persona of mentor was never intended to be found in human mortal experience and its essence is metaphorical.

In contrast, Clutterbuck (1991) proposes a nonliterary heritage and suggests that the origins of how the term "mentoring" is used today lie in fact and not in fiction. He argues that the roots of modern-day notions of formal mentoring are found in the concept of apprenticeship that existed prior to the Industrial Revolution. Over many years the master craftsman would impart his experiential knowledge of his craft and business to his apprentice who in turn would work for the master. In contrast to the mythical representations of the mentor where the mentor's efforts are not driven by personal gain, the relationship here was mutually beneficial in real terms. The craftsman gained as did the apprentice who would eventually replace the master in the business.

Regardless of whether the origins of today's notion of mentoring lie in Homer's mythic Mentor, or that of Fenelon, or even in the craft guilds, the cultural image of the mentor that is our legacy, at least in western cultures, is a weighty one. Little (1990, p. 298) summarises it as follows: "The relationship between mentor and protégé was profoundly personal and mutually respectful, even though it was essentially asymmetrical. It exacted high demands and yielded substantial rewards."

As Levinson (1978) and others (e.g., Sheehy, 1974) have shown, real life offers examples of relationships that possess at least some of the special qualities of the mentoring relationships found in literary works. In an attempt to convey the complexity that such relationships possess, Levinson (1978, p. 98) stated that mentoring was not to be defined "in terms of formal roles but in terms of the character of the relationship and the functions it serves."

Since Levinson, the definitions of mentoring in the workplace context have attempted to identify the elements of the character of the relationship and its functions. Depending on one's point of view, the special "magic," the undefinable chemistry, alluded to by Levinson, has been successfully identified and labelled or it has been ignored altogether. Some definitions have reduced the mentor to a set of functions; others have made the mentor synonymous with coach or learning facilitator. Yet in others, the mentor has been endowed with so many admirable qualities that he or she can only be described as superhuman or even approaching the divine tutor found in Seigneuret's literary analysis of the mentor (1988). A review of the educational mentoring literature alone, has Roberts and Chernopiskaya (1999, p. 83) conclude that "a mentor may teach, guide, be a role model, coach, counsel, assess: empower, nurture, be a 'professional friend', be non-judgmental, be a 'buddy', promote reflective practice, instruct and offer protection and encouragement within a safe environment."

Clearly, to be an ideal mentor is a very demanding, if not impossible, challenge. Yet there are definitions of normal everyday workplace mentoring that are couched in these terms. A descriptive definition of the workplace mentoring relationship that has been very influential in forming the basis for many subsequent definitions has been Kram's (1985). She describes mentoring in terms of the functions it serves.

3.2.2 Mentoring for career advancement

In a study of hierarchical relationships in a business organisation, Kram (1985) describes as mentoring relationships those relationships that have a developmental outcome for the junior partner. She notes that to varying degrees, these relationships provide psychosocial functions and career functions. The psychosocial functions refer to those aspects of the relationship that help nurture in the learner a sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness as a professional. The psychosocial functions include role modelling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counselling, and friendship. Career functions refer to those aspects of the relationship that promote career development. These career functions include sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. According to Kram, the presence and extent of these functions vary across relationships that can be defined broadly as mentoring, and they also vary within a relationship at different times.

The career development function of the naturally occurring mentoring found in workplaces has been taken up in many formal mentoring programs. The literature published in the last ten years shows that the career development function continues to be a dominant influence on how the mentoring role is defined in programs: "We have come to know mentors as those who guide and nurture the career growth of others" (Al Huang & Lynch, 1995 cited in Andrica, 1996). The mentoring programs for professional induction, for the advancement of employees in disadvantaged groups, for succession planning, and management training attest to the use of formal mentoring for the purpose of career advancement. In this function, the mentor counsels, role models, and promotes and sponsors the mentee (Kolbe, 1994; Reid, 1994).

In a list of fifteen definitions (Jacobi, 1991), sourced from education, management, and psychology, all, with two exceptions, depict the mentor as fulfilling a career development function. However, Jacobi found that the career function was just one of a number of roles or functions that were ascribed to mentors. She identified fifteen different roles or functions. While she suggests that these may be categorised as functions that provide emotional and psychological support, functions that provide direct assistance with career and professional development, and functions to do with role modelling, some of the functions are clearly concerned with promoting learning. To illustrate, I have reordered in Table 3.1 Jacobi's fifteen functions into three different categories according to purpose. Although not discrete, the first category is predominantly concerned with enhancing career development; the second with personal or psychosocial development; the third with professional or job performance.

Table 3.1. Categories of mentoring functions (adapted from Jacobi, 1991, p. 509)

Category One **Career development**	Category Two **Personal development**	Category Three **Professional or job performance**
Bypass bureaucracy/access to resources	Acceptance/support/encouragement	Coaching
Visibility exposure	Clarify values or goals	Information
Protection		Role model
Social status/reflected credit		Advice or guidance
Sponsorship/advocacy		Training instruction
Socialisation/"host and guide"		Stimulate acquisition of knowledge
Challenge opportunity/ "plum assignments"		

While the functions in the first category are strongly related to mentoring for career development, the eight remaining functions listed in the second and third categories have a wider applicability. It is these functions that, I suggest, have been extracted from the more traditional career development mentoring role to form the basis of mentoring programs designed for a much broader range of learning purposes. Whether it is appropriate to call somebody who performs a subset of these eight mentorship functions, or even all of them, a mentor remains debatable.

3.2.3 Mentoring for learning

The recasting of the mentor as a "facilitator of learning" is evident in a new raft of definitions used in workplace mentoring programs and training. The following are just some examples taken from the literature on organisational mentoring and on teacher mentoring that are indicative of how mentoring has been appropriated by practitioners and scholars in the related fields of education, adult learning, and training and development:

"A mentor's role is to promote intentional learning." (Kaye & Jacobson, 1996, p. 44)

"A major assumption of mentoring, of the one-to-one model of interaction, is that the purpose is to develop mentor–mentee learning guided by educational rather than therapeutic principles and goals." (Cohen, 1995, p. 18)

"The work team leader is the mentor to the individual team members—developing them, allowing them to learn at every opportunity." (McMahon, 1993, p. 123)

"The main role of a mentor is that of coach." (Coley, 1996, p. 48)

"They [the mentors] help course members to apply the learning processes and outcomes of the course to the work situation in their own colleges or schools." (Lilley & Newton, 1990, p. 71)

The workplace learning category from which these definitions are drawn includes mentoring programs that aim to help transfer learning from the formal training of university courses, vocational courses or even workshops to the workplace. It also includes programs that help employees to respond positively to change in the organisation; programs that aim to improve workplace performance through reflective practice; and programs that help mentees to learn the informal knowledge and nonformal knowledge of the workplace (Colletta, 1996). The extent to which the mentor is expected to intervene in the mentee's learning experience varies as does the context.

At one end of the continuum, there are prescriptive programs in which the mentors have the expertise their mentees need to develop and are told the techniques or strategies to use in their mentoring interactions with the mentees. These kinds of programs use workplace mentoring as a form of workplace instructional delivery (Tovey, 1997). In one such example reported by Billett, McCann, and Scott (1999), mentors used guided learning strategies including questioning dialogues, diagrams, and analogies to help mentees learn while on the job. In that program, the strategies—which were new to the mentors—aimed at encouraging "the mentee rather than the mentor to be doing the thinking and acting" (Billett et al., 1999, p. 8).

Toward the other end of the range, there are programs in which the context for mentoring is a specific project or a mentee's personal development plan (Coley, 1996) rather than being everyday work. In these cases the mentors may not have all the technical expertise required by the mentees, but they are able to faciltiate access to the necessary experts. The role of mentor in these kinds of programs has similarities with Daloz's notion of mentors as "guides through transition" (1983, p. 24).

Mentoring for the purposes of workplace learning has also led to experimentation with different kinds of mentoring arrangements. The traditional mentor–mentee dyad has been joined by the co-mentoring dyad and the triad comprising for example, the mentor, the mentee, and the manager of the mentee (Coley, 1996). Group mentoring has also been recommended as an alternative to the dyad arrangement (Long, 1997). Kaye and Jacobson (1995, online) describe group mentoring as follows:

> Group mentoring places a successful organization veteran with a group of four to six less-experienced protégés. They exchange ideas as a group. They analyze their development issues as a group. They receive feedback and guidance as a group. And significantly they bond as a group. While building its team-development skills and interpersonal-interaction skills—skills that also have important applications on the job—a mentoring group becomes a "learning group," in which the members can interact with peers as well as gain exposure to the mentor, or learning leader.

Clearly, group mentoring does not offer the same kind of confidentiality that is an element of the mentoring dyad. On those grounds alone, it could be argued that this kind of learning facilitation is not mentoring at all (Gibb, 1994). Notwithstanding this critique, group mentoring has strong advocates. In reflecting on the drawbacks of the traditional mentoring dyad, Long (1997) for example, argues that group mentoring circumvents difficulties concerning power differentials, gender issues, and personality incompatibility that are often associated with the dyad structure. In organisations where mentors are scarce, group mentoring can also result in more efficient use of a mentor's time and expertise. From a learning perspective, Kaye and Jacobson (1995, 1996) argue, that in their experience, group mentoring offers more opportunities for learning than the dyad structure simply because each learner is interacting with more than one other person in a supportive learning environment. Also important is the more collaborative interpretation of learning implied in this arrangement which Kaye and Jacobson (1995, online) claim "spreads responsibility for learning and leading among many peers as well as the learning leader."

Although different from the traditional mentor–mentee notion of the mentoring relationship, the variations discussed so far retain at least one element of the traditional. The common element is that some kind of formal or informal contractual understanding exists in each arrangement concerning the role of the mentor and the mentee. In other words, the participants are able to define themselves as one or the other in the relationship. In many organisations, however, mentoring for workplace learning has done away even with this element. These organisations have introduced professional development for management, frontline managers, and supervisors that aims at developing a "mentoring style" in their interaction with other staff. In the context of promoting learning in the workplace, a "mentoring style" means an approach that encourages people to think and that values their ideas (McMahon, 1993; Slipais, 1993). Possible confusion can arise however, when the organisation ascribes the term "mentor" to a person who is using a "mentoring style" but is not a mentor in a mentoring arrangement.

This slippage is evident in the description of the trainer's role in a beer brewing company (Slipais, 1993) where the in-house trainers are seconded from workteams to be trained as instructors. Part of the training involves key mentoring/coaching skills which are listed as "problem solving, decision-making, assertion skills, delegation, negotiation skills, listening skills and management/supervisory skills" (Slipais, 1993, p. 139). The role of the trainer is described as follows:

> The company qualified instructor (seconded trainer) is seen as mentor and coach in that the trainer not only plans, develops, implements and validates training activities to increase performance of trainees, but also acts as a trusted counsellor/adviser to those under training. (p. 134)

In this organisation the goal is to develop a learning culture where "self-directed, self-paced but guided learning" (p. 134) is encouraged and rewarded. The rationale for training existing employees as instructors who return regularly to their work teams, is to make a "mentoring style" of interaction the norm within the organisation. This case illustrates the extrapolation of the mentoring relationship away from the idealised intimate, private, and mutually rewarding developmental relationship between two people. Here mentoring is more a way of interacting with one's co-workers and subordinates in everyday practice than a special kind of personal relationship.

In this section I have portrayed the different faces of the mentor persona that employees can encounter in their workplace in informal or formal mentoring relationships. The first is of the "ideal" mentor who acts as guide and wise friend. The second is of the workplace formal mentor who helps the mentee develop a career path. The third is of the mentor who facilitates workplace learning for mentees. This third persona has many variants and is arguably the most confusing. At its most sparing, it is nothing more than the boss, manager, supervisor, or the Human Resources personnel, adopting a "mentoring style" in their interactions. At its richest, it describes an interpersonal relationship between a mentor and a mentee in which the common goal is the personal and professional growth of the mentee.

The interpretations of workplace mentoring described here have been very much in instrumental terms. What is distinctly lacking in this section are interpretations of mentoring relationships, both naturally occurring and organised, that come from lived experience. The reason is simple—the focus in the literature is almost invariably on the program as a set of processes and expected outcomes. There is almost a total silence about personal experience. In-depth personal stories told by the mentor or mentee are not common in the mainstream mentoring literature. Daloz (1986) and Ervin (1995) provide a useful resource in this respect.

Daloz (1986) narrates his own experiences of mentoring adult learners and tells of the transformational journeys undertaken by some of his adult learners. His model for mentoring is discussed in the next chapter because it formed the basis of the mentor training workshops in this study.

Ervin (1995) discusses four case studies of women academics in mentoring relationships. The stories she tells are about both organised and naturally occurring mentoring relationships with some having been beneficial to the mentee and others having had destructive consequences. The stories of her subjects reveal the ambiguity, the conflict, the frustration, and the disappointments that can come from mentoring relationships especially from organised mentoring relationships. Clearly portrayed in the narratives is the power differential between mentor and mentee. In these cases its impact on the relationship and on the mentee's standing in her workplace are reported as being almost always negative.

With this thesis I add more voices of personal experience to the literature on formal mentoring. I attempt to help restore the balance between formal mentoring as an intervention and formal mentoring as a personal relationship between two people.

3.3 Value of mentoring programs to organisations

If the wide range of purposes for which mentoring programs are implemented is any indication, the perceived value of mentoring to organisations is considerable. Although no two mentoring programs are alike, the purposes of most mentoring programs fall into at least one of the following categories:

- for induction into a profession or organisation (Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Murray, 1991);
- for planned career development of junior managers and professionals (Dymock, 1997; Wilson & Elman, 1990; Zey, 1984);
- for promoting personal and organisational learning (Caldwell & Carter, 1993b; Kaye & Jacobson, 1996; Jossi, 1997);
- for instilling a "corporate culture" (Chiogioji & Pritz, 1994; Lewis, 1996);
- for training workers to develop skills and knowledge to assist in managing change (Bell, 1995; Zagumny, 1993);
- for transferring to the workplace skills learnt in training (Cameron & Jesser, 1992); and
- as a form of guided on-the-job learning (Billett, McCann & Scott, 1999; Tovey, 1997).

The many benefits that these programs can bring to the mentee, the mentor, and of course to the organisation, have been well documented. Although the benefits depend on the nature of the program, some of the more general benefits reported by mentees include a better understanding of the organisation's structure and culture, improved problem solving techniques, generally improved professional performance, and personal benefits (Fagenson 1989; Dreher & Ash 1990; Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher, 1992).

For the mentor, the benefits from sharing one's experience with a willing learner can go well beyond a sense of personal satisfaction and renewed vitality—although these benefits are regularly reported (Lewis, 1996; Murray, 1991). More tangible benefits that flow to the mentor can include an increased network within the organisation through former mentees (Forret, Turban & Dougherty, 1996); increased peer recognition and career advancement (Clutterbuck, 1991); and improved interpersonal skills (Clutterbuck, 1991).

For the organisation, Jacobi's (1991) review of the literature has shown that benefits include leadership development, expansion of employees' knowledge, faster deployment of talent, and a greater contribution to the organisation from workers. To this list Lewis (1996) adds better trained staff and the development of an organisational culture that includes a positive orientation to learning. Another important reported benefit to organisations is improvement in communications within the organisation (Clutterbuck, 1991; Forret, Turban & Dougherty, 1996).

These lists are by no means exhaustive and are only an indication of the purported benefits that mentoring programs bring to the stakeholders. My intention here is not to dwell specifically on any of these benefits. Rather, it is to discuss the value of mentoring programs to organisations in terms of two organisational assets described as human capital and social capital.

In this section I propose that the value of mentoring programs to an organisation lies in their capacity to develop the human capital of the organisation and its social capital. Bullock, Stallybrass, and Trombley (1988, p. 106) define human capital as the "ability, skill and knowledge of individuals which is used to produce goods and services" while Coleman (1988, p. 100) describes it as "the acquired knowledge, skills, and capabilities that enable persons to act in new ways." Intellectual capital as used by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 245) is similar to the notion of human capital and refers to the "knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity, such as an organization, intellectual community, or professional practice." Social capital refers to those relationships and networks wth their associated norms and trust that are a resource to the organisation. Portes (1998, online) notes that "[w]hereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships." Using the term "actor" to refer to both the corporation and its members, Gabbay and Leenders (1999, p. 2) define social capital in the organisation context as "the set of resources, tangible or virtual, that accrue to an actor through the actor's social relationships, facilitating the attainment of goals."

Implicit in all the mentoring purposes listed earlier, is the understanding that through mentoring, the mentee develops new knowledges and skills which add to the organisation's human capital. Also implicit is the aim of mentoring programs to establish, in accordance with predetermined guidelines, new social relations between two people or, in the case of triads or bigger groups, between more than two people. By matching people into previously non-existing relationships or, at the very least, by changing the way people relate to one another in existing relationships such as that of supervisor and worker, mentoring programs are creating new social capital. In summary, mentoring programs are able to contribute to the human capital of an organisation by enhancing its social capital.

In the remainder of this section I will discuss the kinds of knowledge and skills that mentoring programs can develop. I focus on the comparatively elusive knowledge called personal practical knowledge (PPK) because that was the particular component of human capital that the mentoring program in this study was designed to develop.

This is followed by a discussion on social capital in which I explain some of the connections between social capital, human capital, and learning. These connections help reveal that mentoring programs are social interventions that establish new kinds of social relations for the purposes of producing particular kinds of learning. These connections also contribute to understanding how the mentoring program in this case evolved into a learning community. The section concludes with examples drawn from the literature that show how mentoring programs add to an organisation's social capital.

3.3.1 Mentoring as human capital building

Human capital is far more than the knowledge and skills that are learned about in university courses and other formal education settings and even these are human capital to an organisation only if successfully transferred and applied in the workplace. At the beginning of this section, I listed general purposes for which mentoring programs are implemented in companies and organisations. Embedded in those purposes are kinds of knowledges that are distinctly different from formally acquired knowledges. Human capital includes those various knowledges that are created collectively and individually in the organisation over time spans of years, months or even instants. The common element to all of these knowledges is their basis in experience.

The kinds of knowledge that mentoring programs develop in a workplace can be categorised as industry-specific human capital and firm-specific human capital (Becker, 1964; Pennings, Lee & Van Witteloostuijn, 1998). Industry-specific human capital is the knowledge, skills, and routines that are particular to a specific industry and thus has currency across multiple organisations in the same industry. It is acquired through formal education and industry experience. Firm-specific human capital refers to the idiosyncratic knowledge, values, and routines that are bound up in the practices of an organisation. This form of capital is unique to an organisation and has limited relevance or transferability outside the organisation itself. It is acquired over time through working in the organisation itself.

Another way of viewing knowledge that cuts across these two categories is to distinguish between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Cervero, 1992). These knowledges are also described as information versus know-how (Kogut & Zander, 1993) or explicit versus tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967). Declarative knowledge is knowledge *that* something is the case, whereas procedural knowledge is knowledge of *how* to do something. Declarative knowledge can be learnt about whereas procedural knowledge is learnt by doing. Procedural knowledge comes from experience and in this research project it was described as personal practical knowledge (PPK).

The particular kind of knowledge that this mentoring program aimed to develop in mentees was personal practical knowledge (PPK). Personal practical knowledge (Butler, 1994) is real world knowledge, school of hard knocks knowledge, craft knowledge, know how. It is context specific, unique to the individual, largely implicit, and difficult to articulate. It is also resistant to change (Edwards, 1994). The very characteristics of PPK, which make it invaluable to both the professional and the employer, make it impossible to commodify. PPK is very difficult to document and cannot be modularised or taught traditionally. Personal practical knowledge is a particular type of vocational knowledge that grows with experience and through thoughtful reflection on experience. Researchers such as Benner (1984, Benner et al., 1995) and Connelly and Clandinin (1986) have researched and charted the PPK of professional practice in nursing and teaching respectively.

One objective of this Project was to explore how people can effectively tap their own PPK and that of fellow workers to produce performance improvements at the individual, team, and corporate levels. It was found (Balatti & Edwards, 1998; Rigano & Edwards, 1998) that organisations can directly influence the generation of PPK within their workforce. The depth, the quality, and the accessibility of one's personal practical knowledge can be enhanced by deliberate interventions that are cognisant of how PPK is acquired, used, and analysed. Providing ongoing opportunities for experiential learning is only the beginning. Mentors and role models are important but not sufficient. PPK develops when people acquire powerful skills and models to reflect and talk about professional experience with colleagues in their everyday work. However, the learning of these new skills requires frame breaking (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994) and a period of "deskilling" or unlearning of old ways of doing. This may produce frustration and even a temporary negative impact on performance. Many companies and even educational organisations often do not provide an environment that offers the time and the professional space to grow without fear of censure (Balatti & Edwards, 1998). In this Project, the training provided the models and skills useful in developing PPK; the ALEs were the vehicle for learning how to tap PPK in a non-threatening situation; and the mentoring program was there to support participants in their learning.

The capacity of a mentoring program to help develop an organisation's pool of experiential knowledge depends in great measure on the mentor. Gagne (1985) found that a major difference between experts and non-experts in any field is that experts have far more procedural knowledge. For that reason, at least in traditional mentor–mentee arrangements, employees are usually selected or invited to be mentors because relative to the mentee, their procedural knowledge or PPK makes them experts in the required area (Clutterbuck, 1991; Gibb, 1994). Depending on the purpose of the mentoring program, the expertise may be in job based know-how, in the uncodifiable social knowledge of the organisation itself, or even in the knowledge required by the organisation to produce cultural change. Mentors are also often selected because they have skills and interest in helping others generate their own PPK in the designated field. Consequently the organisation's human capital stands to benefit in two ways from a successful mentoring program. First, the extensive knowledge that has been accumulated by the mentors about their job, profession, and the firm is being shared; second, with their mentors' facilitation, mentees are creating new knowledge through their own PPK.

So far I have argued that mentoring can contribute to the human capital of an organisation by helping employees develop knowledges that are important to their practice. The other major contribution of a mentoring program to the organisation is of course, the body of knowledge and skills involved in mentoring itself. Most mentoring programs include a training component. Organisations have recognised that the expertise acquired from formal mentoring experiences can contribute to making a mentoring style of interaction more widespread in the workplace (Slipais, 1993).

3.3.2 Mentoring as social capital building

Along with physical capital, financial capital, and human capital, social capital has entered the vocabulary of managers and organisation researchers as another organisational resource to be identified and researched. Like these other resources, it, too, is a resource that can be managed (Leenders & Gabbay, 1999b). Although social capital is often incidental to, and not the primary purpose for group activity (Coleman, 1988), studies have recommended that policy making should take into account the social capital of an organisation. Leana and Van Buren III (1999) for example, propose that policy on employment practices influences a firm's social capital. Brass and Labianca (1999) observe that training policies to date have been framed almost exclusively from a human capital perspective. They argue that better policy would emerge if the role of social capital in the acquisition and diffusion of skills in an organisation was considered. They support their argument with two studies (Burkhardt & Brass, 1990; Papa, 1990) that revealed that social capital affected how people learned to use new technology.

Fundamental to social capital theory is the proposition that networks of relationships are a resource that can facilitate access to other resources of value to individuals or groups for a specific purpose. While social capital theory can be traced back to classical sociological theory (Portes 1998; Wall, Ferrazzi & Schryer, 1998), its usefulness in current times lies in highlighting those aspects of social structure that lead to economic or social gain for either groups or individuals. In this discussion, the gain that I investigate is primarily in terms of the learning capacity of an organisation.

In the last decade, the sociological term "social capital" has gained popularity in research and social policy literature across the fields of sociology, anthropology, economics, community development, and education. Portes (1998, online) notes that "studies have stretched the concept from a property of individuals and families to a feature of communities, cities and even nations." Social capital has been viewed as a private good, that is, an asset owned by individuals, and as a public good that is owned by a group and beneficial to members of that group (Leana & Van Buren III, 1999). In the context of organisations, research has explored intra-organisational social capital and inter-organisational social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Leenders & Gabbay, 1999b). Because the mentoring program in this study involved only members from the one organisation my focus here is on intra-organisational social capital.

Gabbay and Leenders (1999) trace the first use of social capital in organisation research to Flap and De Graaf's (1986) study on job mobility. The origins of the term however, go much further back to the early twentieth century. According to Woolcock and Narayan (2000), the first recorded use of the term was by Hanifan (1916, p. 130), a superintendent of schools in West Virginia who invoked the concept of social capital to describe

> those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit.... If [an individual comes] into contact with his neighbour, and they with other neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community.

In recent times, writings influential in the development of social capital theory have been those of Bourdieu (1986), Putnam (1993), Coleman (1988, 1990), and Fukuyama (1995) with Coleman's work being probably the most cited in the contexts of work organisations and learning. Coleman (1988, p. 98) states that:

> [Social capital] is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure.

According to Coleman (1988), the main aspects of social relations in which the capital inheres are the obligations, expectations, and trust set up within the relationships; the information channels created in the social structure; and the norms and sanctions operating within the collectivity.

Building on Coleman's work, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 243) define social capital in the work organisation context "as the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit." They identify the attributes of social capital along three dimensions or clusters: the structural, the relational, and the cognitive dimensions. The structural and relational dimensions draw on Granovetter's (1992) network analysis of structural and relational embeddedness. The structural dimension of social capital are the "impersonal linkages between people or units"(p. 244). It comprises network configurations and appropriable organisation, which refers to the use of existing networks for purposes other than those intended. The relational dimension is the features of personal relationships. These include trust, trustworthiness, norms and sanctions, obligations and expectations, identity and identification. The third cluster of attributes described as the cognitive dimension refers to shared language, codes, and shared narratives within the organisation.

This third dimension is expanded by Talmud (1999, p. 107) who calls it "cognitive corporate social capital." I include it here because it points to the importance of social relations in facilitating those kinds of workplace learning that are beneficial to the organisation or firm. Talmud (p. 108) defines cognitive corporate social capital as "the extent to which a firm can facilitate advantageous business action by using internal networks which reconstruct shared understanding, disciplinary power, mental models, organizational identity, tacit knowledge, corporate norms, the ability for corporate foresight, reflexivity, and self-awareness."

One strong indicator of the presence of social capital in a group whether it be an organisation, community, or society in general, is the element of trust (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Trust has been identified by most theorists as being both a prerequisite to, and a consequence of, social capital building. In the organisational context, Leana and Van Buren III (1999, online) distinguish between fragile trust and resilient trust. Fragile trust tends to be based on formal contractual arrangements. Resilient trust on the other hand, is based on relationships and shared experience. They suggest that organisations or groups strong in social capital are characterised by large amounts of resilient trust and they sum up the difference between the two kinds as follows: "If fragile trust is concerned with developing a workable strategy of reciprocity, resilient trust rests upon ongoing reciprocity norms."

In addition to trust, Leana and Van Buren III (1999, online) identify associability as another strong indicator of social capital. They define associability as "the willingness and ability of participants in an organization to subordinate individual goals and associated actions to collective goals."

The benefits of social capital to organisations or firms and their members have been researched (Burt, 1997; Gabbay & Zuckerman, 1998; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). For individual members, contacts and networks can mean increased employee skills, and increased opportunity for career development and promotion. For the organisation, Leana and Van Buren III (1999) identify four broad bands of potential benefit: the individual commitment of employees to the collective good; a more flexible work organisation; an effective and efficient mechanism for managing collective action; and a method of facilitating the development of the intellectual capital in the firm. It is this last area of potential benefit that is of most interest in this thesis. Although often couched in managerial rather than in learning terms, other studies have confirmed the impact of social capital on learning. Included amongst these has been research exploring the relationship between social capital and product innovation (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998), and social capital and information flows within an organisation (Burt, 1992).

The connections between social capital, human capital, and learning have not gone unnoticed by scholars of organisations and of learning (see Coleman, 1988; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Hansen, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Schuller & Field, 1998). For example, Coleman (1988) studied the effect on the formation of human capital of social capital in the family and in the community. In another study, Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1997) explored how social capital mediates the effect of parental financial and human capital on leaving school.

The relationship between social capital and human capital has especially attracted the interest of researchers who theorise learning as a social activity. In a discussion of the kinds of social arrangements that best promote lifelong learning, Field and Schuller (1997, p. 17) state:

> Social capital ... treats learning not as a matter of individual acquisition of skills and knowledge, but as a function of identifiable social relationships. It also draws attention to the role of norms and values in the motivation to learn as well as in the acquisition of skills, and the deployment of new know-how.

While not referring explicitly to the notion of social capital, Kogut and Zander (1993, online) acknowledge the role of social relations in an organisation's capacity to learn:

> Firms define a community in which there exists a body of knowledge regarding how to cooperate and communicate. ...In our view, firms are efficient means by which knowledge is created and transferred. Through repeated interactions, individuals and groups in a firm develop a common

understanding by which to transfer knowledge from ideas into production and markets.

The relationship between learning, social capital, and human or intellectual capital as defined earlier has been theorised in a number of ways. Here, I discuss two different but compatible models. One is from Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), two organisation scholars, and the other is from Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) whose research is principally in adult learning.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 251) propose a model that represents hypothesised relationships between social capital and intellectual capital (Figure 3.1). They begin with the premise that, as with the creation of other resources (Moran & Ghoshal, 1996; Schumpeter, 1934/1961), the creation of new knowledge (i.e., learning) involves the processes of combination and exchange. Combination refers to "combining elements previously unconnected or by developing novel ways of combining elements previously associated" (p. 248) and exchange refers to the exchange of knowledge resources between different parties through social interaction and coactivity.

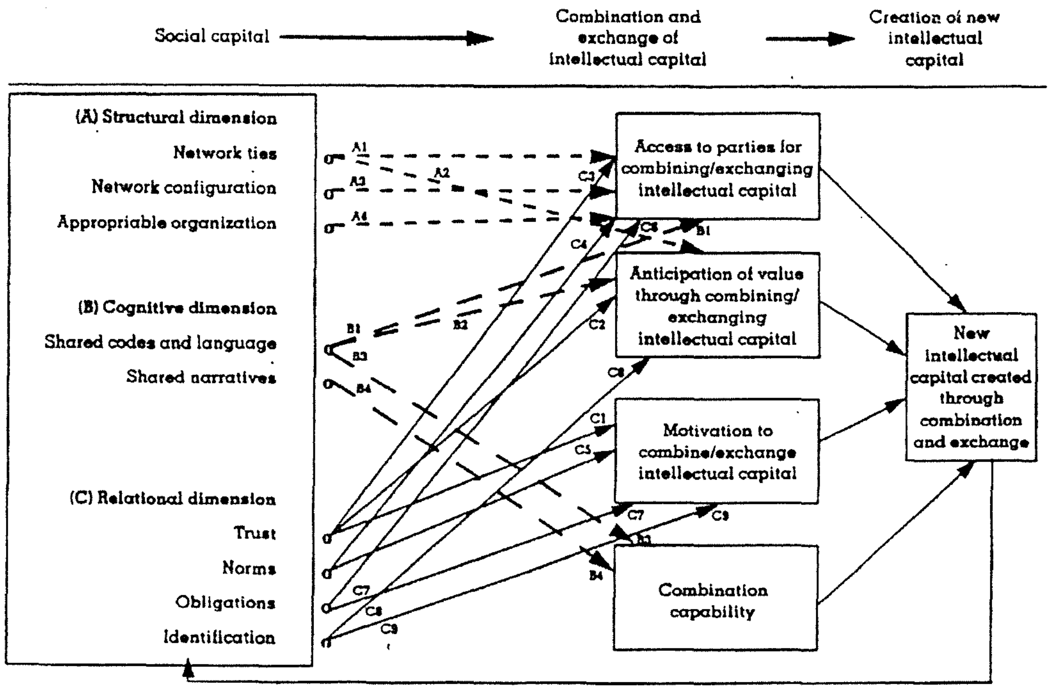

Figure 3.1. Social capital in the creation of intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 251)

Drawing on the work of Moran and Ghoshal (1996), Nahapiet and Ghoshal then list four factors or conditions that apply to the creation of new intellectual capital, or learning. In summary form, the four factors are:

- The opportunity must exist to make the combination or exchange.
- The parties involved must have the expectation that there will be value in availing themselves of the opportunity.
- As well as the expectation, the parties involved need to experience the motivation to participate in the interaction leading to the creation of intellectual capital.
- Finally, participation needs to be accompanied with "combination capability," that is, the capabilities to combine knowledge must exist. These capabilities do not only reside in an individual's capability but also in the links across individuals' capabilities.

The model demonstrates how these four conditions are influenced by the various elements of social capital that Nahapiet and Ghoshal have grouped into the three dimensions of the structural, the cognitive, and the relational. As one example, the model shows that the network ties in the structural dimension influence access to opportunities where knowledge can combine or be exchanged.

Although Nahapiet and Ghoshal's focus is on how social capital influences the development of intellectual capital, they note that sociological theory (for example, Berger & Luckman, 1966) would suggest that the reverse is also true. Just as social relations affect the amount and kind of intellectual capital circulating in an organisation, the existing knowledge and skills would influence its social practices including those aspects of social structures that facilitate social capital.

The co-evolution of social and human capital referred to by Nahapiet and Ghoshal is represented in Falk and Kilpatrick's model (2000) of how social capital is built and used (Figure 3.2). The diagram is reproduced here and referred to again later in this chapter. Unlike the Nahapiet and Ghoshal model, this model depicts intellectual capital as a subset of social capital.

In contrast with Nahapiet and Ghoshal's theoretical model, Falk and Kilpatrick's is derived from an extensive empirical study of interactions in a town in rural Australia between members of local networks which they call "communities of common purpose." It demonstrates, to use Nahapiet and Ghoshal's term, the exchange and combination of resources between participants at the point where these processes occur, that is, at the point of interaction between participants.

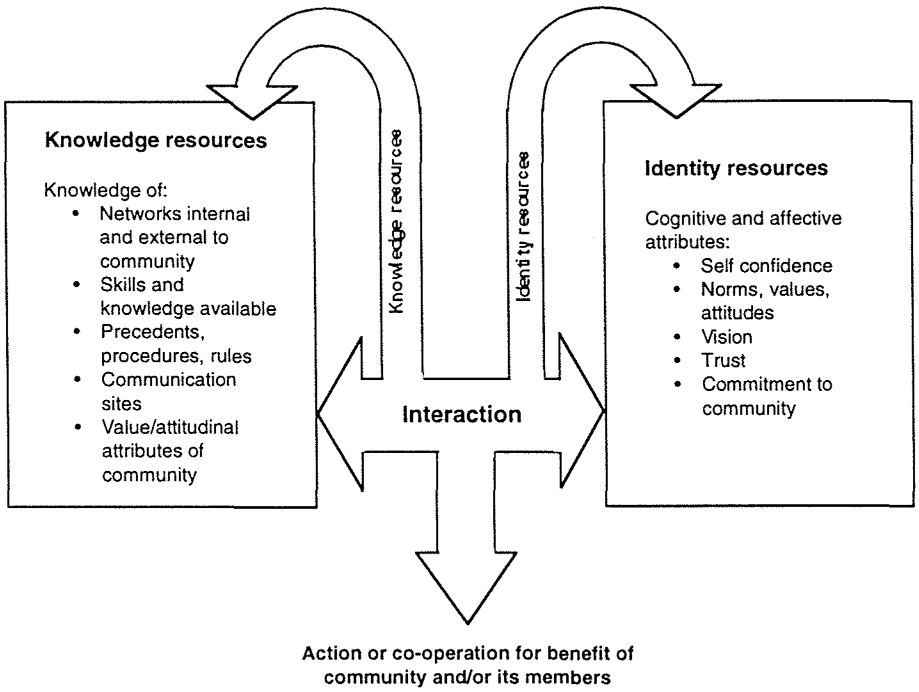

Figure 3.2. Simultaneous building and using social capital (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 101)

The model consists of three components: the interaction between participants; the resources potentially available to that interaction; and the desired outcome of the interaction. Where Nahapiet and Goshal begin with the need for the opportunity for the exchange and combination of knowledge to take place, Falk and Kilpatrick begin with a common purpose shared by the participants. The desired outcome is the common purpose that unites and motivates the group (as small as two) to interact. The interaction can be face-to-face, but need not be (it can be a phone interaction or by electronic mail); it can be formal (e.g., a meeting) or non-formal (a chance meeting in the street or corridor). The resources are knowledge and identity resources and these are located within the network and outside it. Knowledge resources are described as the "common understandings related to knowledge of community, personal, individual and collective information" (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 99). They comprise what is usually described as human capital but includes "community of common purpose"-specific human capital (analogous to the industry- and firm-specific human capital discussed earlier). Identity resources are described as the "common understandings related to personal, individual and collective identities" (p. 100). Trust is one element included here that features strongly in social capital theory generally. Falk and Kilpatrick's findings suggest that trust is the social glue, the mutual expectations that bind communities together and "inheres in the situated, observable and accountable reciprocity of every micro interaction" (p. 104).

According to this model, the social capital available to the participants lies within the knowledge resources and the identity resources that are brought to the interaction by the participants individually and collectively. The subset of these resources used to achieve the desired objective of the interaction constitutes the social capital on that occasion. In all likelihood, a different set of interactions for a different common purpose will draw on a different subset of resources. According to the model, the value of the social capital available to the participants in an interaction is determined by two factors: first, the match between the desired outcome and the knowledge and identity resources brought to the interaction; second, the nature of the interaction itself. Central to the model is the interaction. The efficacy with which resources are drawn on is determined by the processes that occur within the interaction and the conditions under which the interaction takes place.

The model represents the relationship between the social relations (interactions) and the resources brought to those interactions as a dialectic one. According to this model the nature of the interaction potentially changes the resources that store the participants' social capital just as the resources themselves impact on the nature of the interaction. Neither the social capital nor the social relations through which it is accessed remain static.

In this respect, the Falk and Kilpatrick model is consistent with the distinction that Gabbay and Leenders (1999) make between social structure and social capital. They define social structure as the "networks of actors who are in some way connected via a set of relationships" and social capital as the "resources, inherent in the social structure, that accrue to corporate actors" (p. 1). According to Leenders and Gabbay (1999a) social capital and social structure are two different but related entities which co-evolve because social capital is "*inherent* in social structure, as an outcome and generator of social structure"(p. 484). Chapter Six explores the dialectic relationship between social capital and social structure in terms of its importance to learning in the peer learning support system in this study.

A review of the mentoring literature from a social capital perspective, shows that mentoring programs are in fact an intervention that impacts on the learning of an organisation by influencing its social capital. Yet little research has investigated the relationship between mentoring and the social capital of an organisation. The only study appears to be an empirical study by Higgins and Nohria (1999) in which they test the hypothesis that mentoring increases the social capital that the mentee enjoys over the course of his or her career. In their study, social capital is conceptualised as an asset possessed by an individual, the mentee, and is operationalised as the number of social ties the mentee has across multinational subsidiaries of the firm.

Unlike the Higgins and Nohria study which regards social capital as a private good, in this discussion of the contribution of mentoring programs to social capital, I take a broader view of social capital as an asset of the organisation as well as that of individuals. In other words, it is a public good as well as a private good. In further contrast to the Higgins and Nohria study in which social capital is regarded as a possible mentoring outcome discrete from the mentoring process, I argue that the mentoring process itself is implicated in the organisation's stock of social capital. To do this, I use the distinction Leeander and Gabbay (1999b) make between social structure and social capital to propose that the mentoring program is an intervention that aims at changing the social capital of the firm through changing its social structure.

Although the term "social capital" has not been used in the literature on mentoring, the essence of all mentoring programs is to create new social relations between individuals and between departments or sections in an organisation. An awareness that the value of mentoring lies in its capacity to draw on and develop the existing social capital of the organisation is evident in the aims of mentoring programs. Strong examples include programs that seek to increase cross–functional networking, improve technology transfer within and across divisions (Coley, 1996), and move "knowledge through the organization from the people who have the most experience and learning" (Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995, p. 51) to those who have less.

It is this capacity to draw on existing social capital and to generate new social capital that Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Scandura (1998) are referring to when they propose that mentoring is becoming increasingly important in the changing world of work. In an era where a new way of working labelled the "boundaryless career" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) is taking the worker across many organisational boundaries, Scandura (1998, online) suggests that "mentors will be needed to fill the gaps in continuity that will be created by greater movement between organizations."

If social capital inheres in the social relations between people in a firm, and mentoring is about establishing certain social relations with particular characteristics, it is reasonable to conclude that mentoring programs have the potential to change the social capital of an organisation as well as its human capital. In fact, it can be argued that the changes wrought to the human capital of an organisation by a mentoring program are contingent on it having made changes to its social capital.

In discussing the concept of social capital so far, I have focused on its positive outcomes especially in terms of how it facilitates the development of human capital. I have discussed how mentoring programs are one example of a social intervention where social capital is called on and generated for the purposes of promoting learning that produces new knowledge and skills in the organisation. Despite most literature focusing on the positive aspects of social capital, researchers note that the same social relations that contribute positively to the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and in this case, organisations, may also have unfavourable outcomes (Portes, 1998). Gabbay and Leenders (1999) use the term "social liability" to describe social relations that produce deleterious effects while Portes speaks of negative social capital. Portes (1998) describes a number of situations where one can argue that social capital has negative consequences. For example, the same strong ties within a group that generate group bonding and coherence may also restrict individual freedoms or cause members of the group to make excessive claims on other members. They can also prevent members from making strong ties with people outside of the group which can lead to downward leveling norms within the group. Portes notes that strong ties within a group can even exclude new members from joining and thus making it impossible for them to benefit from the resources that the group's social capital generates. In other words, social relations that generate social capital for one purpose may have a high social or individual cost attached or they may not be useful and even be detrimental for another purpose. These examples of how a set of social relations that constitute social capital for one purpose can be a liability for another suggest the possibility that mentoring programs may also have unintended deleterious effects for an organisation or its participants. Although the negative impact of some mentoring relationships on individual participants has been documented (e.g., Ervin, 1995), no studies to my knowledge have been conducted on unintended negative consequences of mentoring programs to organisations.

In this section I have explored the value of mentoring programs in terms of their capacity to enhance the human capital and the social capital of the organisation. I have suggested that mentoring programs help people learn because of the new social relations formed between participants. Later in this chapter, I again call upon social capital in a discussion of the notion of a learning community.

3.4 Factors influencing the success of a mentoring program

In addition to the extensive literature on the benefits of formal mentoring and on how to set up and manage programs (Clutterbuck, 1991; Lewis, 1996; Murray, 1991), there is a small but increasing body of work concerned with the difficulties in implementing mentoring programs and their sometimes less than expected results (Ervin, 1995; Gibb, 1999; Long, 1997; Roesler, 1997; Scandura, 1998). Case studies (Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995; Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992) are revealing that the potential impact of mentoring programs in workplaces is being substantially reduced because very little or no interaction is occurring within a significant number of mentoring relationships. Lack of time and lack of proximity to the mentee are the most commonly reported reasons for the lack of contact. Scandura's (1998) and Ervin's (1995) studies explore dysfunctional mentoring relationships, a topic which has attracted very little research to date. These are just some of the difficulties that program managers are finding, but the fact remains that some programs have better outcomes than others, and that similarly structured programs are more successful in some organisations than in others. This suggests that there are a number of different kinds of factors that influence the success of a mentoring program.

Formal mentoring programs are social interventions in organisations and, as such, their success is influenced by organisational factors as much as by factors to do with program management and with the individual mentors and mentees themselves. Many of these factors are applicable to all formal mentoring programs while others are particular to programs for specific purposes. Programs designed for career advancement for example, have a set of factors unique to them. For instance, a mentoring program to support succession planning requires that opportunities for advancement exist in the organisation (Murray, 1991). In this section I am restricting my discussion to some of the more important factors that affect those mentoring programs that are forms of guided learning implemented to improve job and professional performance. I am also restricting the discussion to mentoring programs for which the mentor–mentee relationship is the basis.

3.4.1 Mentoring program of best fit

The challenge that formal mentoring programs pose to management is a dual one. For a mentoring program to meet its organisational objectives, management aims to seek the program of best fit for the organisation and the mentoring relationships of best fit for the program participants. In terms of a match between the program and the organisation, one of the most important factors is the organisation's readiness for such an intervention. Two key elements that help define an organisation's readiness are its culture and the resources it can contribute to the program.

Kram (1985) stresses that the viability of a mentoring program in a workplace depends very much on the culture of the workplace by which she means "its values, informal rules, rites, rituals, and the behaviour of its leaders" (p. 164). In an alternative definition of culture, Schein (1996, online) describes it as the " set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and, to some degree, their overt behaviour."

According to Kram, organisations in which the workforce displays low trust in peers or superiors are unsuitable for mentoring programs. So also are organisations in which short term results are rewarded at the expense of quality of working life or the personal and professional development of its people.

Work design is another factor identified by Kram and others (Burke & McKeen, 1989) that impacts on the success of a program. The work design in an organisation needs to contribute to an environment in which mentoring can physically take place. A study of mentoring programs in five different workplaces using the same guided learning techniques (Billett, McCann, & Scott 1999), showed that mentoring as a learning strategy is not suitable when work is organised in such a way that opportunities for extended dialogue with superiors or co-workers is minimal.

The match between a mentoring program and the cultural context of an organisation is further complicated by the various subcultures that exist within the one organisation. It is complicated because, as Schein (1996) explains, functional units within an organisation form their own subcultures, and organisational learning is dependent on the successful crossing of the cultural "boundaries" that separate these subgroups. The culture of the manufacturing department is different from that of administration. Different subcultures form around different hierarchical levels in the organisation. Frontline managers share a unique set of assumptions born out of shared experiences; as do department managers; as do the rank and file. Occupations and professions, too, have subcultures. The engineers of the world, for example, share a set of assumptions or a set of "values, norms and structures" (Little, 1990, p. 299) that is different from that of the industrial chemists, which is different again from the set shared by scientists.

The existence of organisational subcultures has implications for the design of formal mentoring programs. Should the assumptions underpinning the mentoring programs be at odds with the prevailing culture of, say, a professional group involved in the program, then its prospects for success are potentially poor. School teaching is one such profession in which mentoring is incompatible in many ways with the culture of the profession. In analysing the implementation of mentoring programs in schools in the

United States, Little (1990, p. 303) concluded that the single most important obstacle encountered was the "consistent pressure to accommodate the individualistic and egalitarian traditions of teaching and to discount the status distinctions implied by the mentor title." In situations like these, further supportive intervention is a consideration, as is the re-evaluation of the appropriateness of formal mentoring as a method of fostering learning.

The existence of subcultures also has implications for organisations in which mentoring programs are being used deliberately to cross subgroup boundaries. This is often done by pairing mentors from one department with mentees of another. Such mentoring relationships could take longer to develop as the partners learn to understand each other's culture. As Roesler (1997) found in such a mentoring program, the process of building trust between mentor and mentee took up to six months despite the use of pre-relationship contracts and trust agreements. The implication for management in these kinds of programs is that good quality learning may not occur for quite some time.

While the existence of subcultures needs to be taken into account, case studies confirm Kram's argument that the success of mentoring programs also depends very much on the behaviour of the organisation's leaders. In particular, case studies (Coley, 1996; Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995; Messmer, 1998) indicate that the extent to which management values participation in the mentoring program impacts on its success. The value that management places on the program is demonstrable in a number of ways including: the program's incorporation in the organisation's strategic plan; active endorsement of the program including recognition and rewards; and the commitment to the program in terms of resources.

The resources that an organisation makes available for the mentoring program is a strong indicator of its readiness. Contrary to Lewis's (1996, p. 10) claim that the "only necessities are time and at least two people," organisations are finding that mentoring programs do need to be resourced adequately. Geiger-DuMond and Boyle's (1995) experience as consultants and Human Resources specialists has them conclude that both mentors and mentees and even the employees' supervisors need ongoing support, counseling, training, and follow up. All these processes require resources.

Long's (1997) comprehensive review of the literature confirms that, in addition to this, an ongoing investment in coordination, evaluation, and program development is also required. Furthermore, Long found that even "time and at least two people" are often in short supply as good mentors tend to be overcommitted.

Once a program has been implemented, practitioners stress that it takes time before a good match between the program and the organisation is achieved. Murray suggests (1991, p. 188) that at least two or three years are required before a program is fully integrated into the organisation. In discussing a workplace mentoring program that had been operating for four years, Geiger-duMond and Boyle (1995, online) note that the mentoring program evolved over those years building on "prior mentoring activities at the firm, including informal experiences, several pilot programs, and grass-roots mentoring efforts." Just as an organisation is organic so is a mentoring program and the program of best fit is one that is open to ongoing modification.

3.4.2 Mentoring relationships of best fit

The term "mentoring program" is useful because it labels a strategy or initiative, but its existence remains only in the hypothetical realm unless it leads to effective mentoring relationships being forged in the organisation. It is the mentoring relationships between co-workers that breathe life into a mentoring program. The very nature of a formal mentoring relationship however, makes the process of trying to establish mentoring relationships of best fit very complex. Notwithstanding the many differences between mentoring relationships within the one program and the differences between relationships across different programs, there are two irreducible elements common to all. First, the formal mentoring relationship is contrived and located in the public space. Second, for the relationship to be a mentoring one, the interactions between mentor and mentee need to be in the private and personal realm. In effect, the social and cultural space in which mentor meets mentee in the formal mentoring relationship is at the intersection of these two dimensions that are the public and the private.

The public manifests itself in a number of ways. Even though the mentoring relationship appears to be only between the mentor and the mentee(s), there is a silent partner—management. This is inevitable because the very raison d'être of the formal mentoring relationship is to meet organisational goals. To meet these goals, the relationship is established through organisational intervention: mentors and mentees are selected and matched; its life span is predetermined and is usually anything up to a year; mentor training is designed to influence the interactions; the relationship is monitored; its outcomes are evaluated. In the sense that the formal mentoring relationship is an organisationally manufactured artefact, all the processes just listed are factors that influence the success of a mentoring program.

Of equal importance to the public is the private dimension of the formal mentoring relationship. For the relationship to be successful, the mentor and mentee need to cultivate within the shell of the socially engineered environment an interpersonal learning relationship that is satisfying to both parties. Qualities such as trust and rapport for example, make the difference between a perfunctory relationship and one that is rich in learning potential. The extent to which management and policy can manage these interpersonal factors is debatable and experience has shown that such relationships cannot be mandated. For this reason, most programs seek voluntary participation from both prospective mentors and mentees (Burke & McKeen, 1989; Clutterbuck, 1991). But as Roesler (1997) found, for participation to be genuinely voluntary, participants need to be confident that declining the offer to participate brings no official or unofficial censure or punishment.

The interplay of the public and private facets of the formal mentoring relationship makes the social and cultural context in which the mentor and mentee need to "perform" very complex. Unlike the naturally occurring relationship that forms, develops, and dissolves without the management and surveillance of a third interested party, the formal mentoring relationship is subject to such intervention and scrutiny.

Notwithstanding their differences, the existence of both naturally occurring and formal mentoring relationships are subject to at least two preconditions that are the same. The first is the *willingness* and *ability* of the mentor to mentor and the second is the *willingness* and *ability* of the mentee to be mentored. I have already discussed many of the factors that affect the ability of mentor and mentee to engage in a productive formal mentoring relationship. The issues of purpose, time, skills, and opportunity that impact on the viability of a mentoring relationship are factors over which management and the culture of the organisation exercise a lot of influence. In the rest of this section, I explore the theoretically based literature, albeit not extensive, that helps identify factors that impact on the *willingness* or reluctance of participants to engage in workplace formal mentoring relationships.

3.4.2.1 The mentor's willingness to mentor

The reality is that mentoring exacts a cost from the mentor at the very least in time, added responsibility, and emotion (Gibb, 1999) for a purpose designed primarily to reap benefits for the mentee. The question this raises is why would an employee volunteer to be a mentor? Gibb explores this question by drawing on the social theories of social exchange and communitarianism. The social exchange perspective suggests that mentors are willing to mentor if the personal rewards outstrip the personal costs. The communitarianism position on the other hand, proposes that the mentor's willingness to mentor is not tied to a cost benefit analysis at all. The mentor's motivation to mentor is prompted by a sense of community spirit and a belief that to help others learn is a moral obligation. Clearly, each theory suggests different factors that influence a person's willingness to mentor.

While acknowledging that the role of mentor is defined in many ways and often not clearly, Gibb (1999, online) states that "as a role its essence, in a phenomenonological sense, is virtuousness; it is, apparently, pro-social helping behaviour par excellence on the part of mentors." The social exchange perspective suggests that people engage in pro-social, virtuous behaviour because there are mutual benefits to be gained for the cost incurred. Here people are seen to be "rational calculators" (Gibb, 1999, online) keeping an ongoing tally of costs and benefits attached to a relationship. In contrast, communitarianism would argue that people offer help and assistance with no expectation of personal gain whatsoever. Rather, they do so from a sense of obligation, from a sense that, as good community members, helping others is the right thing to do. Unlike the rational calculator in the social exchange theory, here the person is driven by moral and affective imperatives.

If an organisation subscribes to the social exchange theory, then the willingness of mentors to mentor is seen to depend on anticipating and realising sufficient personal reward from their mentoring interactions. The inclusion of mentor benefits in most case studies of mentoring programs and in mentor training workshops is perhaps prompted by a belief that social exchange theory does adequately explain much of human behaviour at least in the workplace.

According to Gibb (1999), there are certain preconditions that the organisation must supply for social exchange to take place. The main ones concern providing an environment where exchange can actually occur, that is, where there is an ongoing opportunity for "generous tit-for-tat." Gibb suggests that social exchange requires the opportunity for frequent interactions to occur in a stable environment of not more than 150 people.

The communitarianism perspective, on the other hand, places no upper limits on population size and no minimums on frequency of interactions. The necessary preconditions here are a strong sense of community and a set of values and practices in the organisation that make volunteering a norm. In a sense, it is this perspective that one associates with the "ideal" naturally occurring mentoring relationship. At most, the personal reward is a sense of satisfaction achieved from giving back to the community.

After researching a number of mentoring programs, Gibb (1999) concludes that, in practice, the willingness of individual mentors to mentor in any given program is sometimes explained by one theory and sometimes by the other. He concludes by suggesting that before implementing a mentoring program, the organisation needs to identify the extent to which social exchange and communitarianism explain its own organisational culture. It then needs to determine the extent to which the organisation wishes the mentoring program to change or to reinforce the existing culture. One option is to deliberately go about implementing a program to promote a culture that values either social exchange or communitarianism. An alternative option is to combine elements of both.

3.4.2.2 The mentee's willingness to be mentored

Again, if one constructs the formal mentoring relationship as a helping relationship, it follows that for the relationship to exist the intended beneficiary of that help, the mentee, needs to be willing to accept the proffered help. Gibb's (1999) application of social exchange theory provides one explanation for a mentee's willingness or reluctance to accept help. From this perspective, mentees engage in the relationship if first, they perceive they have a need, and second, if the relationship provides the help they require. In other words, mentees will engage in the relationship if they think it is of value to them. However, other theories give different explanations for a mentee's willingness to be mentored. Little (1990) calls upon social psychology theories that explain a person's resistance to or acceptance of help. Zagumny (1993) takes a different perspective again and uses social learning theory to explain a mentee's readiness or willingness to be mentored.

According to Zagumny (1993), the mentee's perception of the assigned mentor's expertise impacts on his or her willingness to accept help. Zagumny applies Bandura's (1977) social learning theory to argue that trust is essential to a successful mentoring relationship and that trust begins with the mentee believing that what the mentor has to offer is in his or her best interest.

Social learning theory suggests that people learn new behaviours from observation and practice. A person can learn how to behave in particular ways by observing whether such behaviours are rewarded or punished in others. This theory suggests that through vicarious reinforcement and punishment, the observer begins to learn appropriate behaviours which are then reinforced through practice.

From this perspective, Zagumny (1993) would suggest that the willingness of a mentee to engage in the relationship depends on the mentor demonstrating behaviours which the mentee perceives to be valued in the organisation. For management, this theory implies that the process by which mentors are selected and matched with prospective mentees is very important for two reasons. First, the theory supports the importance of assigning a mentor to a mentee in whom the mentee has confidence. Second, because social learning theory reveals the influence of role modelling in learning, it is important that management is satisfied that the behaviours of the prospective mentor are in fact considered desirable by the organisation.

Like Gibb (1999), Little (1990) also begins with the notion that the mentoring relationship is based on virtuous pro-social behaviour. Where Gibb explored possible explanations for why people would give or not give help in a mentoring relationship, Little considers reasons for people accepting or rejecting that help. To do this, she draws on four models proposed by Fisher, Nadler and Whitcher-Alagna (1983) that explain a person's probable resistance to or acceptance of aid. Although Little uses these theories to better understand mentee behaviour in specific mentoring programs for teachers here I shall consider implications of these theories more generally for any workplace mentoring programs.

The first perspective based on equity theories begins by claiming that people seek parity in their interpersonal relations. Using this theory, the extent to which people accept or reject help depends on whether they think that the helper is getting some form of benefit as well. This theory suggests that people are reluctant to accept help if they feel that they will be indebted to the helper, in this case, the mentor.

A second perspective derived from reactance theory says that people are reluctant to accept help if they think that such help or advice will restrict their freedom of choice. This theory would suggest that people are less willing to accept help if they feel their autonomy is compromised, and more willing, if they feel they can retain at least the same control as before over their activity.

The third position comes from attribution theories. People's response to proffered help can be explained by their perception of why the help has been extended to them. External attribution refers to people attributing the offer of help to factors unrelated to their personal attributes, for example, they may believe that the help is extended because a particular task or project is extraordinarily difficult or unusual, or because they have assumed a new role in the organisation. In contrast, internal attribution is when people believe that the help is being offered because of personal incompetence or lack. This theory suggests that people might be more willing to accept help from a mentor if they think it is being offered to help them deal with external circumstances beyond their control.

The fourth and final perspective relates willingness to accept help to anticipated effect on self-esteem and social identity. This position argues that people are more willing to accept help if, in so doing, they do not feel that it is demeaning to them in any way. This signals to program coordinators the importance of how the program is promoted to their staff. If for example, the program is perceived as remedial in nature then there is likely to be mentee reluctance to participate. If, on the other hand, the program is promoted as an initiative that is part and parcel of how the organisation functions and participation is voluntary then mentees may be more willing to be mentored.

Formal mentoring programs are based on the premise that there are three beneficiaries to a successful mentoring program—the mentee, the mentor, and of course, the organisation (Zey, 1984). To achieve these outcomes, programs aim to foster mentoring relationships that bridge the private and public spheres of workplace experience. The requirement for this nexus is the reason programs need management. The degree to which the mentoring relationship is managed or left to develop or atrophy of its own accord is determined by policy. As I have mentioned before there is an extensive literature on program management that covers processes such as matching, monitoring, training, ongoing support, and program evaluation. All these are factors that impact on the program's success.

Because it cannot be assumed that the mentor–mentee relationship emerges naturally or positively in this formal context where the private meets the public, the literature stresses the need for roles clarification. Not only do the mentor and the mentee need to reach some agreement on their expectations of the relationship, but as Murray (1991) strongly urges, the program coordinator and the natural boss also should be involved in the conversation.

The extent to which the mentoring relationship is prescribed or managed in programs varies. In the study of one workplace mentoring program, Dymock (1997, p. 11) concludes that mentoring relationships work best when "guidelines for the frequency of meetings, the relative responsibilities of the mentor and mentee in initiating meetings, and the likely range of matters for discussion, are clearly established and mutually agreed upon early in the program." In another case study of an actively managed mentoring program (Roesler, 1997), its success was partially attributed to a confidentiality agreement and a trust agreement that were signed by the mentor and mentee at the beginning of the program. The confidentiality agreement was a contract that included an "out" clause that could be invoked in "the event of sexual harassment, discrimination, fraud or violation of business conduct guidelines." The more personal trust agreement was negotiated between the mentor and mentee and this included common understandings concerning mentoring style, commitment and confidentiality. These examples are an indication of how prescriptive and managed programs can be.

Although not comprehensive, this section has discussed some of the more important factors that influence the success of a mentoring program. I have discussed factors that are company related, program related, and factors that have to do specifically with the mentoring relationship itself. The literature indicates that successful programs tend to be those that are simultaneously actively managed and sensitive to the personal nature of the mentoring relationship. Interestingly, when programs are not as successful as anticipated, the recommendations made almost always concern increasing or qualitatively changing the level of management. Better matching processes, more training and monitoring, more formalised agreements, and more prescriptive guidance seem to be the more common suggestions for improvement. Reducing the level of management does not appear to be a consideration.

So far in this chapter I have reviewed the literature on formal mentoring in the workplace. Most of the literature constructs the mentee and not the mentor as the "learner" and therefore the focus is on the outcomes of mentoring programs for the mentees. This was also the perspective with which I first approached this study. One of the "silences" (Gusfield, 1992) that this perspective produces in the literature concerns the mentors' experience in learning how to interact in formal peer learning support arrangements such as mentoring dyads. For me, the way in which the mentoring experience unfolded over the eighteen-month period made this the most compelling aspect of the program. As the experience of the forty-five participants in this case showed, these interactions did not come easily, if at all. In the next section, I describe the adult learning theories I used to interpret how the participants in particular, the mentors, went about learning how to help their co-workers learn.

3.5 Learning to help co-workers learn

There are many theories that help explain what happens when adults learn (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Each makes its own epistemological and ontological assumptions concerning the nature of human beings, their environment and learning, and each has its own andragogical foci.

The first two models of adult learning described here, Butler's model of human action and change (1994, 1996) and the Benner (1984) model of skill acquisition, were presented at the workshops as tools for participants to understand their own learning and that of others. The mentors especially referred to the models in reflecting on their mentoring experiences in interviews with me and they regularly used the language associated with the concepts in conversations with one another. The models are discussed here because not only are they a part of the participants' narrative, but they are two of the lenses I used to interpret how participants were learning to help one another learn.

In the Butler and Benner models the focus is on the individual. Through these models, learning or transformation is viewed as a function of mental processes, especially of reflection, and the locus of control lies with the individual learner. In the second half of this section I turn primarily to the work of Wenger (1998) and that of Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) in which learning is viewed as social practice and is explained through models that focus on group interactivity. One element common to all the theories presented here is the importance of experience to learning. All come from a view that learning from, or in, (social) experience is central to the way people make meaning.

3.5.1 Mentor as learner

Butler (1994, 1996) sources the origins of his model of human action and change in the practical philosophy of Gadamer (1979) and his own empirical studies of professional performance. Learning is seen as a process internal to the individual and born out of reflection on experience.

There are five components to the Butler model of human action and change (Figure 3.3)—public knowledge, personal knowledge (also called personal practical knowledge), world view, professional practice, and reflection. Two of these elements, performance and public knowledge are located in the social domain while personal knowledge and world view pertain to the self. Professional practice or performance is human action. Public knowledge is "all that abounds outside the self in the form of theories, formal knowledge, policy directives, research results, quality assurance processes, hints and folk lore, community expectations etc. that seek to direct and perfect human performance" (1996, p. 270). Personal knowledge or personal practical knowledge (PPK) has been discussed earlier and refers to the knowledge "attained through lived experience" (1996, p. 271). Our world view, which is partly derived from tradition and culture, comprises the beliefs, assumptions, and values through which we interpret experience. It is the filter through which we perceive the world and therefore it determines to a large extent how we perform and reflect. Our world view delimits our potential to reflect, learn, and change the way we act.

Reflection, the fifth element, comprises the processes that articulate the other four elements and is "the open, active communication channel between the outside social context and the inner self" (1996, p. 270). Drawing on Schon's (1983, 1988) and Boud, Keogh and Walker's work (1985), Butler explains that reflection is essential to learning and consists of three modalities: reflection to action for when the purpose is to plan for future action; reflection in action where both action and reflection are occurring at the same time; and reflection on action which is a retrospective analysis of action.

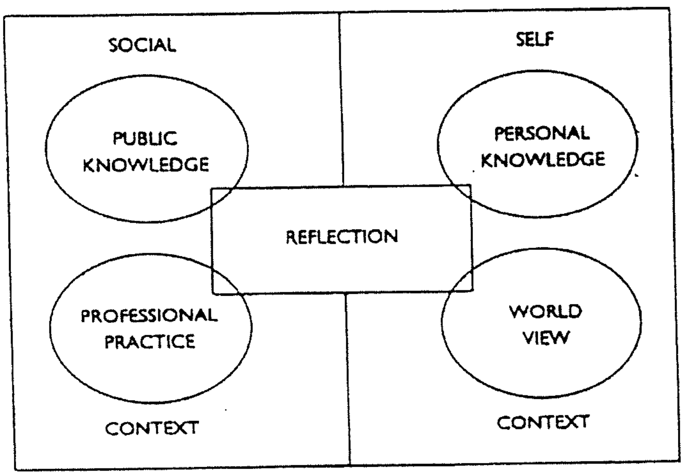

Figure 3.3. Components of Butler's model of human action (Butler, 1996, p. 270)

Reflection is central to Butler's model of adult learning and central to the professional development research project of which the mentoring program in this study was a part. The Project was based on the premise, supported in many studies (Daudelin, 1996; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Schon, 1983, 1988), that people can improve the way they reflect and hence learn.

Butler's model suggests that people's everyday workplace performance is heavily influenced by the quality of their reflection. It also suggests workers' progress from novice to expert is dependent on the quality of their reflection. Benner's model (1984) of professional development, which is based on Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1986) work, accounts for the importance of both reflection and PPK in progressing through the stages of novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. Unlike many other models on development of expertise that are trait models, the Benner model is a contextual model which means that expertise is seen as being context related.

In summary, each of the five stages of development is defined by a particular set of behaviours and beliefs. The novice engages principally in rule governed behaviour and has little awareness of the contextual elements that impinge on the task or activity. The advanced beginner believes that solutions to problems are known by someone and hence seeks answers from others. In the competent stage the approach to an activity or project is strongly analytic with tasks or problems being broken down into smaller components while the proficient level is characterised by the ability to synthesise data. The expert stage is a function of the accumulated personal practical knowledge or tacit knowledge that is pertinent to a particular context. At this level, Butler (1996) states that the practitioner reflects unconsciously and would possibly find it difficult to articulate the reasons for taking a particular course of action.

The Butler model (1996) would indicate that employees' professional practice as mentors is determined by the public knowledge they hold about mentoring and other aspects of human activity that impinge on mentoring in the workplace. Performance would also be determined by the personal practical knowledge accumulated through previous experience and especially through experience in the specific context of the professional development project. According to the model, mentors' beliefs and values would also impact on their mentoring performance and finally, this model suggests that it is the quality of the mentors' reflection that ultimately determines the extent to which their mentoring ability would improve.

By applying a model such as the Benner (1984) model to the activity that collectively is called mentoring, it is assumed that it lends itself to the same kind of novice–to–expert analysis that has been applied to professions such as nursing, teaching, aeroplane flying, medicine and even the law. Edwards and Butler did apply the Benner model to mentoring in the training workshops and their interpretation is reproduced in Figure 3.4. If applying such a model to mentoring is appropriate, then the implication for organisations is that employees can learn to become better mentors.

Although useful, these models were not sufficient in explaining why there were so many difficulties with the mentoring program. Initial and ongoing difficulties could not be entirely attributed to individual lack of context specific experience, reflective practice, or mentoring expertise—as these models would suggest. Neither did the models adequately explain the transformations that did occur including changes to the program, to the mentors' understanding of mentoring, and to their practice. Well after the program terminated I called on learning theories that are more sociologically based to help explore these issues further. Included were the notions of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and of a learning community (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Wenger, 1998).

3.5.2 Participant group as learning community

A review of the mentoring programs described in the literature reveals that the practice of holding regular, organised meetings at which mentors discuss their ongoing mentoring experiences is generally limited or non-existent. This is not surprising. Most mentoring programs are based on the assumption that mentors are experts and therefore opportunities to reflect on mentoring experiences are unwarranted. Furthermore, mentoring is considered a private activity between mentor and mentee in which confidentiality is respected and is thus unsuitable for group reflection. The design of most mentoring programs excludes the need for such meetings because they are based on the belief that the important learning occurs in the mentoring micro unit only which, in most cases, is a mentor–mentee dyad.

Stage 1: Novice Mentor

NM has trouble deciding on what are the most relevant things to pay attention to, act on, say or do.

NM needs mentoring. When mentoring them use things they can recognise with limited experience.

NM uses so much concentration just to follow rules that they do not notice contextual factors apart from those on their list.

NM misses the subtleties of interpersonal interactions, and so can underrate the difficulty of good mentoring.

NM needs support while they generate their own experience. Put them with strong, helpful mentees and/or skilled mentors. Possible role for mentor meetings.

Able to follow a set of mentoring questions.

Able to gather basic feedback but benefits from skilled observer giving feedback.

Able to reflect afterwards and learn from the feedback.

Able to express warmth, welcome, and give encouragement.

Stage 2: Advanced Beginner Mentor

Starting to learn from experience

Starts to formulate their own mentoring rules, but not yet able to get to the guts of each unique situation quickly.

Needs support from experienced mentors in setting priorities. Possible role for mentor meetings.

Able to express their mentoring problems and then go searching for answers in books (context free).

Able to break free from procedural questions and reactions and do some planning and responding of their own.

Start seeing weaknesses in the rules, and see mentoring as a complex skill to be learned.

Able to treat people more individually by drawing on limited examples.

Able to recognise some key aspects of the mentee's behaviour and development.

Able to recognise recurrent patterns in mentee's actions.

Stage 3: Competent Mentor

Usually takes 2–3 years of thoughtful mentoring to get there.

Thinks through and analyses each mentoring situation.

Has a conscious goal in mind for their mentee and sees each mentoring meeting as a step towards a long-range goal.

Develops a sense of what is uniquely important for each mentee.

Feels emotionally involved and responsible for outcomes, has vivid memories of them. Doesn't blame the rules or the situation.

Needs training with decision-making games and simulations, e.g., role plays.

Needs practice in planning mentor–mentee interactions.

Figure 3.4. Benner model applied to mentoring (Mentor Training Workshop, Edwards & Butler, June 1995)

Stage 4: Proficient Mentor

Usually 3–5 years as mentor.

Perceives mentoring relationships as dealing with the whole person, the whole context.

Has detailed sets of mentoring maxims which they apply in concert with a deep understanding of the particular situation.

Has learned what to typically expect and how to modify their plans in response to changed circumstances.

Zeroes in quickly on what is important in a mentoring situation.

Intuitively organise and understand their mentoring, but still think analytically about what they do.

Best taught by case studies which require them to cite their experience and examples. These should be complex and relate to real mentoring situations. Could be discussed at mentor meetings.

Best taught inductively, you provide the mentoring situation, they provide the ways of understanding the situation. They get frustrated by context-free teaching and will give you all the exceptions.

Stage 5: Expert Mentor

Their mentoring skill has become a natural part of them and is available in an instant.

When mentoring is proceeding normally they just do "what needs to be done."

EM uses intuition and deep understanding. They cannot always provide convincing explanations for what they do.

EM zeroes in on the real problem very quickly and accurately.

When time permits and outcomes are crucial EM reflects before acting. This is not analytical, rather it involves a critical reflection on their intuitions. Only analytical if situation is beyond their experience or has a complexity they have not encountered. Then they can focus all their energy on this.

EM has fluid performance. Things happen unconsciously, naturally, automatically.

It is difficult to capture expert mentor performance with a list of skills or competencies—it is more than that.

Figure 3.4 (continued). Benner model applied to mentoring
(Mentor Training Workshop, Edwards & Butler, June 1995)

When group meetings of mentors or mentees do occur, they are few in number and are usually only for program evaluation purposes or for promoting the program to potential newcomers.

In this respect, this program was not typical. Mentors met regularly to share experiences and learn from one another. This mentor interaction impacted on how mentoring was conceptualised and operationalised at the workplace. It influenced the direction of the mentoring program including the mentoring structures that were trialled and it especially influenced the participants' sense of identity as mentors. The purpose of this section is to provide a theoretical framework for interpreting the evolution of this mentoring program as a group's experience in forming a learning community within their organisation.

The concept of community, sociologists such as Dempsey (1996) warn, is a highly contested one in the social sciences. To illustrate its wide variety of meanings, Dempsey refers to a study (Hillery, 1955) conducted as long ago as 1955 that analysed at least ninety-four definitions of the term in academic literature. It found that there was no basic agreement on the characteristics of a community.

In organisation literature the term "community" has been used since at least the early 1990s. Organisations have been described as social communities (Kogut & Zander, 1993), and even as a community-of-communities (Brown & Duguid, 1994). The construct "community of practice" which Lave and Wenger (1991) used to explore the social dimensions to occupational learning has now been appropriated by organisational studies (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Hendry, 1996). As early as 1993, Kofman and Senge introduced the term "learning community" into organisation learning literature to invoke an alternative, more holistic image of how people can work and learn together. The term aimed to highlight the importance of the "community nature of the self" (Kofman & Senge, 1993, online) to understanding how an organisation might become a place where people want to learn, have the opportunity to learn, and are prepared to take the risk to learn. Since then a substantial body of research has been accumulating on learning community indicators and on the social processes and conditions that make workplaces, schools, technical colleges, and even geographical communities such as towns exhibit the attributes of a learning community. In this thesis I draw primarily on Wenger's (1998) and Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000) work on learning communities. During the discussion, I will again refer to the concepts of human capital and social capital to help identify the resources that members of a community access and build upon in their interactions.

The final concept that I introduce in this section is Schein's notion (1993, 1995) of a "parallel learning system" or "practice field" which he bases on his theory of organisational change. A parallel learning system is a particular learning community designed to change the learning and working practices of the organisation in which it is located. Although the immediate scope of the mentoring program in this study was to help people progress through their action learning projects, the overall intent of the program was to help diffuse into the organisation a new set of skills, norms, values, and beliefs aimed to improve professional practice. In this sense, the project had a similar objective to that of a parallel learning system. However, it was the development of the mentor group as an identifiable entity that led me to consider the value of comparing the community that the mentors formed with Schein's notion of a practice field or parallel learning system.

Before introducing Wenger's (1998) theory of a learning community, I will describe two related concepts: a "community of practice," a term coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), and the more encompassing one of a "community of common purpose," which I first encountered in the writings of Falk and Kilpatrick (2000). Both concepts derive from a social theory of learning in which learning is viewed as social participation where identity transformation, practice, and social structure are mutually constitutive.

3.5.2.1 Communities of practice

In a study of learning through apprenticeships, Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) introduced the term "community of practice" to refer to "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice." They then went on to identify the connection between a community of practice and the learning of its members by stating that the "social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning."

Lave and Wenger (1991) interpret the meaning of learning through a theory of social practice which "emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing" (p. 50). Learning, they stress, is not situated in practice "as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world." Learning, they argue, is about participation in social communities and because learning changes who we are and what we can do, it is ultimately to do with transformation of identity. From this perspective, identity and community membership are interrelated.

In a more recent book called *Communities of Practice*, Wenger (1998) details the interconnectedness of identity, community, practice, meaning, and learning, all of which he explains, are mutually defining. Here I provide an overview of some of the broader principles concerning how a community of practice operates and how identity transformation and participation in a community of practice interrelate.

Wenger (1998) describes practices as the collective learnings of a group or community of people whereby meanings are negotiated and "created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (p. 45). Communities of practice then are "shared histories of learning" (p. 86) that develop during a time span of indeterminate length, but in which there is sufficient mutual engagement in a common purpose to produce some significant learning.

Wenger (1998) argues that practice is a source of community coherence. This comes about in three ways: through the mutual engagement of participants, through the negotiation of a joint enterprise, and through the development of a shared repertoire of resources accumulated over time. Mutual engagement refers to the interactions and relations built up between community members as they negotiate meanings in pursuit of a common purpose. Mutual engagement requires drawing on one's own resources as well as drawing on those of others. It involves "defining identities, establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, [and] who is easy or hard to get along with" (p. 95).

The second factor that draws and keeps a community of practice together is the ongoing process of communally negotiating a joint enterprise. This involves struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting views and interpretations. Because it is ongoing, the process produces relations of mutual accountability among the community members. These include documented rules, policies, standards, and goals, but they also include norms and values that can go unarticulated. Relations of accountability are central "in defining the circumstances under which, as a community and as individuals,... they attempt, neglect, or refuse to make sense of events and to seek new meanings" (Wenger, 1998, p. 81).

The third element is a shared repertoire. This is the shared resources that the community has developed for negotiating meaning. The repertoire ranges from routines, stories, and symbols to the styles and discourses used in practice. Wenger (1998) uses the term "repertoire" to emphasise that while these resources are made available through a history of mutual engagement they are also used to create new meanings.

The term "community of practice" has been used in the study of organisations to highlight that an organisation is not one single socially and culturally homogeneous entity. Rather, it is composed of multiple overlapping communities of practice each having its own knowledges, skills, world views, and practices. Pennings and Lee (1999, p. 49) note that their subculture, specialised knowledge, identity, and parochial interests can result in "communities of knowledge within the firm hav[ing] often easier access to like-communities in other firms that [sic] they do with the sister departments within their own firm."

The implication of the existence of communities of practice for organisations is that learning needs to be seen as "an issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice through which an organization knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization" (Wenger, 1998, p. 8). A similar position is expressed by Brown and Duguid (1994, p. 184):

> To understand the way information is constructed and travels within an organisation, it is first necessary to understand the different communities that are formed within it and the distribution of power among them. Conceptual reorganisation to accommodate learning-in-working and innovation, then, must stretch from the level of individual communities-of-practice and the technology and practices used there to the level of the overarching organizational architecture, the community-of-communities.

So far, I have not given specific examples of communities of practice. Originally, Lave and Wenger (1991) wrote of the communities of practice associated with occupations such as that of tailoring and of midwifery, but they also used the concept to describe the practice of Alcoholics Anonymous. Since then, the term has been used to refer to a particular organisational form that is different from the formal work group, the project team, and the informal networks that co-exist in an organisation (Brown & Duguid, 1994;

Hendry, 1996; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Communities of practice describe "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise ....[who] share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, online).

In this thesis I use the term to describe how the participant group and especially the mentor group developed. I also use Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000) term "community of common purpose." This suggests a broader notion that includes groups that form for a goal or common purpose, but that do not necessarily possess the required expertise suggested by the term "community of practice." It describes groups that may not yet have formed a practice in common. In this sense, a community of common purpose can be considered a prequel to a community of practice. For these reasons, depending on the context, I will be referring to the participant group as either a community of practice or a community of common purpose.

3.5.2.2 When is a community of practice a learning community?

Communities of practice or communities of common purpose are potentially fertile ground for the acquisition of knowledge and the creation of knowledge. Wenger (1998) argues that the extent to which learning or transformation occurs within the community depends on the tension between the two constituents of learning which he defines as experience and competence.

Experience is the production of meaning in social practice and arises out of a process of negotiation combining the two complementary processes of participation and reification. Participation is the "social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises" (Wenger, 1998, p. 55). Reification is the "process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" (p. 58) and includes abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts.

To highlight that it is only through practice that a community determines what it means to be competent, Wenger (1998, p. 137) describes a community of practice as a "locally negotiated regime of competence." Competence or competent membership in the community means that an individual has the abilities (i.e., both the capability and the legitimacy) to participate across the three functions of a community of practice discussed earlier—mutual engagement, negotiation of the enterprise, and access to the shared repertoire. New knowledge is created in the community when there is a "strong bond of communal competence along with a deep respect for the particularity of experience" (p. 214). For newcomers to the community of practice, acquisition of knowledge occurs when their access to the competence within the group is part of a mutual engagement that permits incorporation of that competence into their identity of participation.

Wenger (1998) explains that there are certain processes and conditions that a community of practice must attend to for it to maintain the necessary tension between experience and competence demanded of a learning community. Here I discuss four of them.

First, given that learning is about identity transformation, then for learning to occur, *a place* for that new identity to develop is as important as the processes of transformation. A learning community must provide the place "where new ways of knowing can be realised in the form of such an identity" (Wenger, 1998, p. 215). This implies that a community needs to accommodate different forms of participation. This is particularly important for reconciling the multiple community memberships that participants bring with them.

Second, a learning community recognises that the margins between it and the outside world offer a potentially rich learning ground. There are two kinds of marginality that can produce experiences for generating new kinds of competence in the community. The first kind of marginality comes from participants who are not full participants. They are either newcomers to the community or, for whatever reason, they are only partially engaged in the community of practice. The second kind of marginality is produced by experiences that cannot be fully accounted for by the existing regime of competence. Although a community's core knowledge is a valuable social resource, it is important that opportunities for reviewing and transforming it are not only explored, but encouraged to take place. Such opportunities occur at the margins because, by definition, the community's regime of competence is not fully established there. Consequently, "new interplays of experience and competence" (Wenger, 1998, p. 254) can produce new knowledge and new practices.

A third way in which a community's capacity to learn is increased is by focusing on practices associated with combining different modes of belonging. Developing a sense of belonging is an important part of identity formation. Wenger (1998) identifies three modes of belonging each having strengths and trade-offs. One source of identity comes from the sense of belonging that engagement in the practice of the community offers. The second mode of belonging is generated by the imagination and is the "creative process of producing new 'images' and of generating new relations through time and space that become constitutive of the self" (p. 177). The third form of belonging comes from aligning one's own enterprise to fit and contribute to broader enterprises. Each mode has drawbacks, which can be minimised if a learning community looks at ways of combining different modes.

The fourth way in which a community of practice can encourage learning is by acknowledging that individual learning produces social change in the community and vice versa. This is so because the two processes of identification and negotiability involved in identity formation are structural issues. Identification means "the process through which modes of belonging become constitutive of our identities by creating bonds or distinctions in which we become invested" (Wenger, 1998, p. 191). Through engagement in practice, we shape our identities not only by what we do, but also by our relations with others. While processes of identification define which meanings matter to us, negotiability refers to our involvement and capacity in shaping those meanings in the community of practice. Wenger states that learning is a process of social reconfiguration and therefore, a learning community is fundamentally involved in the reconfiguration of relations within it and also of those between it and the external broader networks to which it belongs.

Wenger's recommendations for making a community of practice a learning community find support in Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000) analysis of community interactions where those interactions that build social capital are called "learning processes" (p. 91). As their model, which was described earlier indicates (see Figure 3.2), social capital is built when interactions generate changes in the community's knowledge and identity resources that are useful to achieving the community's common purpose. In this sense, social capital building is an indicator of a learning community.

Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) found that the extent to which interactions become learning interactions is influenced by the frequency of interactions and the quality of the interactions. That learning requires sufficient opportunities for members of the community to interact is acknowledged as an obvious point, but one that often goes underestimated by policy makers and managers. This oversight is attributed to the tendency to focus on outcomes at the expense of process.

The quality of the interactions is influenced by the knowledge resources available, the ways they are shared amongst the members of the community, and the ways in which they are augmented to serve the common purpose. The identity resources drawn on in the interaction are also important. In terms of identity formation, interactions favourable to learning are those that facilitate "people's agency, willingness or capacity to act for the benefit of the community, and in new and different roles that their previous perceptions of self allowed" (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 100).

Learning interactions have two sets of characteristics in common which Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) describe as the dimension of externality and that of historicity/futuricity. Externality is a spatial dimension. It refers to the relations between the community and the outside world and is akin to Granovetter's (1985) concept of bridging ties between members of a community and the outside world. Historicity/futuricity is a chronological dimension. It refers to the importance of both the storying of past and the imagining of future experience to the quality of the learning that occurs in the present moment. A shared sense of continuity that spans the experiences of existing members with those of new members is particularly important in a learning community:

> Past learning needs to be reconciled with the present, in the context of the knowledge and identity resource of a future gaze or "vision", and that the results of that reconciliation need to be passed on to the next generation. (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 106)

3.5.2.3 Learning community as practice field

An important feature of communities that Wenger (1998), Coleman (1988, 1990), and Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) explore in different ways is their simultaneous "otherness" from, and connectedness to, the world outside their boundaries. Through the concept of closure, Coleman (1988, 1990) emphasises the importance of the internal set of relations between members of a community for the purpose of binding it together. The more close-knit a group is, the more opportunity there is for effective norms to be established and maintained, and for a sense of trustworthiness to develop amongst the members. Through the concept of externality, we have seen Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) draw attention to another set of relations, those connecting the community of common purpose to other communities and to other configurations of social life.

Communities of practice exist as recognisable entities in organisations because the coherence produced through practice inevitably creates boundaries around a community. Wenger (1998, p. 253) states that boundaries indicate that learning is taking place because they are a sign that "communities of practice are deepening, that their shared histories [are giving] rise to significant differences between inside and outside." Through the concepts of boundaries and peripheries, he describes the "edges" of the community of practice which are the points of contact between it and the outside world. Boundaries represent the discontinuities between the community and the outside world while peripheries are areas of overlap and connections. How the changing tensions between the need for closure and the need for externality are played out at the boundaries and the peripheries impacts on the learning experienced by the members of that community.

This dynamic is particularly pertinent to Schein's notion of a parallel learning system or practice field (1993, 1995). These are learning communities within organisations which have been created for the purpose of diffusing learning through the workforce. A parallel learning system is a group of employees undergoing similar learnings who form a support group to enrich the learning process. The way in which a practice field negotiates its boundaries and peripheries is critical to its capacity to generate a learning environment within its boundaries and to influence practice outside them.

Schein's argument for suggesting that parallel learning systems are effective in facilitating organisational learning lies in his theory of individual and organisational change that's based on Lewin's (1953) change model. The model comprises the three stages of unfreezing, change, and refreezing. The first stage of the process requires potential learners to feel two forms of anxiety. For unfreezing to lead to taking action that may produce learning, they need to feel an anxiety arising from the belief that their current practice is lacking. They also need to experience a fear-producing anxiety that comes from believing that if they do not take action, then consequences will be sufficiently negative to be unacceptable. Once the unfreezing has occurred, a parallel learning system or practice field becomes very important in the next two stages of the change process, that is in the change and refreezing stages.

The processes involved in making the transition to new ways of thinking or doing and firmly establishing them in one's repertoire take time and practice. Schein (1993) states that individual learning, especially habit and skill learning, is best supported in a group situation where there is the psychological safety to experiment and make mistakes. This may require temporarily moving employees out of the normal everyday work structure into a learning space where new norms can become established. Such a space comprises a group of people who come together to support and learn from one another. Essential elements of a psychologically safe environment include opportunities for training and practice, and effective norms that legitimise making errors and that reward innovative thinking and experimentation. It is these conditions that a parallel learning system aims to create for its learners.

Creating a rich learning environment within the community however only partially fulfils the objective of a parallel learning system or practice field. Parallel systems are established to power organisational change through a process of diffusion. From a study of successful learning organisations, Schein (1995) notes that the process of diffusion begins with the learning of individuals and continues through to the learning of groups. These groups then become the vectors by which learning permeates the main body of the organisation. For the learning of the parallel group to diffuse through the rest of the organisation, the prospect of rejection of the new learnings by the main body needs to be minimised. Schein describes the organisation as having an immune system that can attempt to destroy new learning if it is perceived to threaten established norms and values. To minimise the chances of rejection, the parallel system needs to reach a critical mass and include members of the organisation that are at the top levels in the hierarchy.

Once a temporary parallel system has emerged, it needs to remain sustainable for as long as it is required. The support from both within the organisation and external to the organisation is critical to its longevity. Because the members of the parallel system are learning new ways of thinking and doing and their activity may not be positively contributing to the company's bottom line during this time, the organisation needs to be able to allocate the resources necessary for the parallel system to develop. These resources include financial support and the time and space to produce a "practice field" for people to learn and make mistakes. In terms of the external support, it may be in the form of expertise from consultants and research centres or it can also be experience-sharing with other organisations going through a similar learning process.

Schein's (1993, 1995) work highlights the difficult position a parallel system as a special kind of learning community needs to negotiate. The difficulties lie in the parallel system having to be partly protected from the pressures of mainstream activity in order to learn, while at the same time, it has to function within the larger organism of the organisation or firm. All its members necessarily have a dual membership because they are employees of the organisation or firm and they are members of the learning community. The situation is made even more difficult because unlike other kinds of learning communities, the very raison d'être of a parallel system is to be the seeding ground for learning that will in fundamental ways change how people learn and work in the organisation at large.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter began with a reminder from Wenger (1998, p. 229) that learning "cannot be designed: it can only be designed *for*." The first half of the chapter reviewed the formal mentoring program as one design organisations are using to foster learning in the workplace. In the second half I discussed adult learning theories that I used in this thesis to help explain the participants' response to the peer learning support system implemented in this study. The purpose of this review has been to establish the context for reading the narrative that begins with the next chapter as that of a formal mentoring program and of an evolving learning community. With Chapter Four I describe the unique context of the company and the professional development project in which this mentoring program was set.

Chapter Four

Contexts of the narrated event

"To be acknowledged as the world leader in the quality of everything we do,
with every employee part of an enthusiastic team, and
with every employee willing to respond to changes
that are needed in a changing world."

The company vision statement

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline some of the contexts within which this mentoring program evolved and which clearly impacted on its development. I begin by describing the situational contexts of the company—the nature of its business, the organisation of its work, its historical legacy, and the economic and social transition that it was undergoing at the time of the program. I then describe the professional development research project (referred to as the Project) of which the mentoring program was a component. It provided a second set of situational contexts nested within those of the company that also influenced the nature of the participants' mentoring experience. I describe the circumstances that led to the implementation of the professional development project and to the inclusion of the mentoring program. I also describe the specific context that constituted the parameters within which the mentoring relationships were to operate. Finally, I sketch the important context of organisational culture that I reconstructed from my interviews with the mentors in the program. For this sketch I draw on their perceptions of how mentoring was part of their everyday work experience at CRL.

4.2 The company context

4.2.1 The setting

The research project took place in a large and established copper refinery approximately fifteen kilometres from the university with which all the research team with the exception of one Chief Investigator was associated. Located in Townsville, a tropical seaport in north Queensland on Australia's eastern seaboard, Copper Refineries Pty Ltd (CRL) is a wholly owned subsidiary of MIM Holdings Limited. MIM Holdings Ltd is a group of organisations mainly involved in the mining of copper, gold, zinc, lead, silver, and coal and related activities in Australia and overseas. MIM's headquarters are in Brisbane in southern Queensland approximately 1500 kilometres south of Townsville.

The copper refinery was commissioned in 1959 in a town, which, although now a major and well-resourced provincial city, did not have the technical service providers required by the refinery during its development. As a result, CRL had become almost completely self-sufficient with its own technical and administrative infrastructure and personnel to service all supporting functions ranging from mechanical, carpentry, and plumbing to payrolls and computing. This legacy had increasingly become a financial burden and was to contribute to the dramatic changes that took place during the lifespan of the Project.

When this study began CRL employed approximately 460 people—both permanent and casual—for unskilled, skilled, and professional labour. Employees belonged to one of two groups, award or staff. Award employees were mainly tradesmen and operators and were members of trade unions. Staff members, approximately 80 in number, were mainly professionals and did not belong to unions. The professional development training was offered only to staff, a decision that I'll explain later in this chapter.

The management team at the refinery consisted of the General Manager and the five managers who were responsible for the five areas of manufacturing, the refinery process, engineering, research and development which included quality assurance, and lastly, human and financial resources which also included computing and supply. The on-site coordinator of the professional development research project including the mentoring program was the Human Resources (H R) Development Officer who was accountable to the Human and Financial Resources Manager.

An important feature of the workforce was its longevity at CRL. Three of the five managers for example, had an average of 30 years service in the company and many of the staff and award workers had worked at CRL for more than twenty years. Clubs for workers with twenty years and thirty years of service respectively, boasted many members. Long-standing employees were celebrated at company dinners and profiled in *The Refiner*, the in-house newsletter.

When this study began, CRL had several business lines to do with refining, manufacturing, and the selling of technology. Its core business was refining the copper mined and smelted by MIM Ltd 800 kms west at Mt Isa. CRL also treated purchased scrap and recovered precious metals and chemical by-products such as arsenic. As almost all the copper came from the one mine at Mt Isa, the vicissitudes experienced by the mine in terms of industrial stoppages, technical difficulties, and restructuring directly affected CRL.

As well as selling the refined copper in the form of thin sheets, CRL manufactured a number of semi-fabricated copper products. Through the use of different moulds, molten copper was cast into rod with each coil weighing up to 5 tonnes; rectangular slabs in lengths of up to 6.5 metres called cake; solid copper cylinders called billet; and wire. Machined copper sections for furnace applications were also produced.

Another major source of revenue for the company came from the sale, in Australia and overseas, of its technology and products for refining copper. Invented in the 1970s by CRL personnel and continually developed since then, the ISA process technology has generated licence fees in South America, Europe, India, and Australia. At the time of the Project, 3 million tonnes of copper were being processed by the 44 companies licensed to use the ISA technology. When plants were being commissioned throughout the world, CRL metallurgists and engineers were away for weeks or even months at a time.

4.2.2 Mise-en-scène

A plan of the plant layout is reproduced in Figure 4.1. The project participants came from all major areas of the plant and the nature of their participation in the mentoring program was often dependent on the demands of their work area.

The two production sites on the plant are the Tank House and the Casting House. In these two sites the non-negotiable priority for workers is the smooth operation of the machinery and computer technology. This took precedence over any demands made by the Project.

In the Tank House the copper is refined using an electrolytic process, so called, because of the hundreds of acid cells in which the anodes are placed.

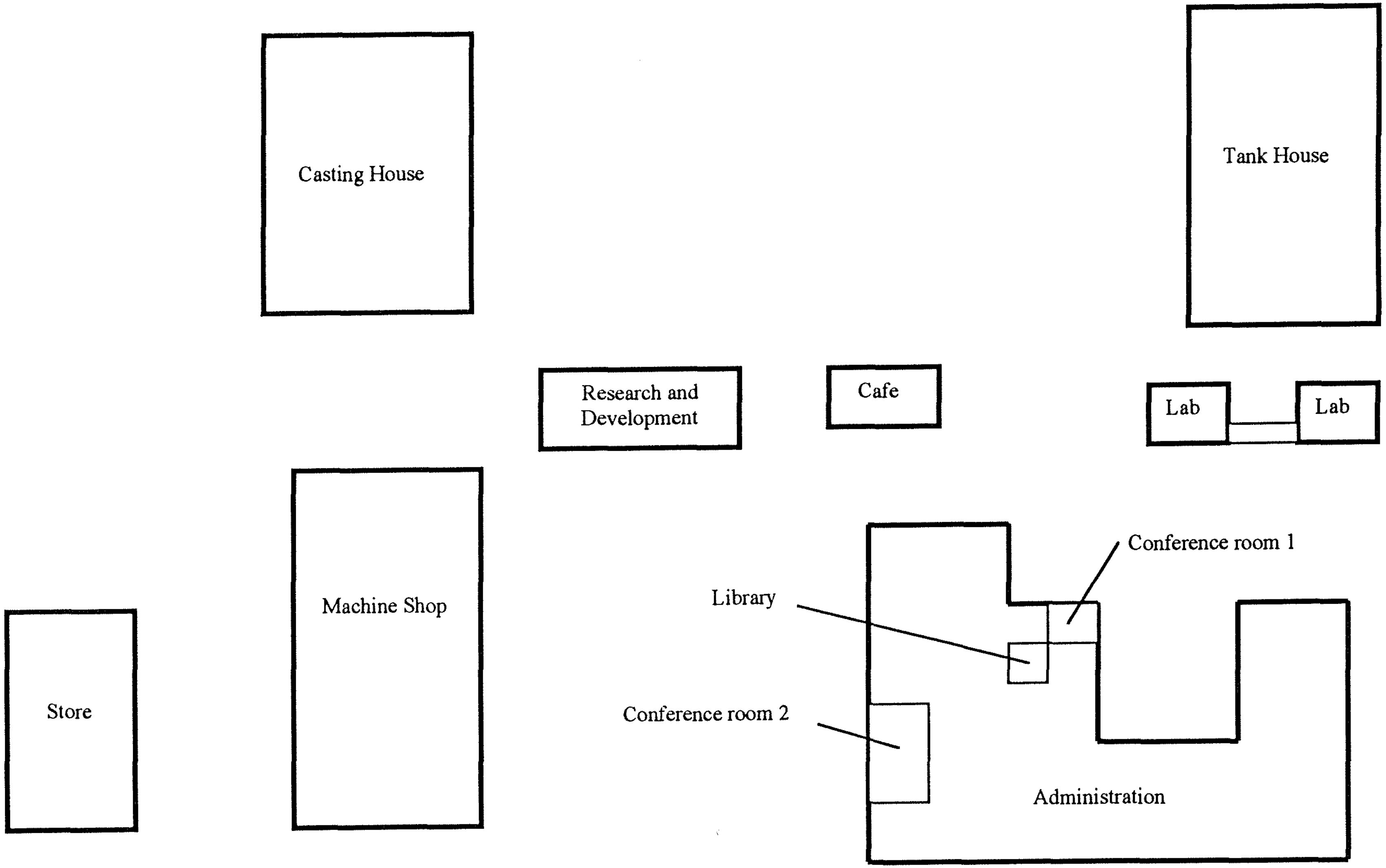

Figure 4.1. Layout of the copper refinery

The electrolyte containing sulphuric acid is maintained at a temperature of 62° Celsius. At the time of the mentoring program the Tank House had the capacity to produce 220,000 tonnes of refined product per year. In response to new copper deposits being located by MIM and other producers, feasibility study plans were under way to investigate expanding the refining capacity.

The Casting House contains furnaces, casting plants, and packaging stations and it's where the copper is moulded. When our study began operations in the Casting House were under threat of closure because some were unprofitable.

An on-site laboratory services the Casting House and the Tank House and its main function is to conduct physical and chemical tests on products to ensure quality standards. At the time of the study, a mass spectrometer had recently been installed to conduct metallurgical assays for outside manufacturers as well as to analyse in-house samples.

The third large metal-framed building on the site is the workshop that contains electrical services and the machine shop where maintenance work for the plant is done. All buildings have crib rooms where employees have breaks and meals. There is also a canteen that serves cheap hot and cold meals.

The large administration building in the foreground of Figure 4.1 housed the majority of the project participants. Almost all the H R personnel, accountants, computer programmers and technicians, and project engineers and designers worked in individual offices in this air-conditioned building. An open door policy prevailed. Another custom was the door-to-door delivery of morning and afternoon teas. Every day, twice a day, Rose the tea-lady would push the tea trolley down the corridors stopping at every door confirming the occupant's preferences—which she knew by heart anyway.

The administration building also contained the library managed by a librarian and her assistant. All employees had access to the facility which included the national copper information service called the Copper Technical Data Centre. As the Project progressed the library's collection of books on organisational learning, mentoring, professional development, and creative thinking was to expand and become well-used.

Two conference rooms regularly used by members of our research project were also housed in this building. These became the key spaces where mentor meetings, information sessions, and participant presentations were held. Although training rooms were situated near the administration block they were rarely used by members of our project because they were too large and resembled classrooms.

My office was on the first floor of a small two–storey building called the R & D block. This floor was occupied by environmental officers and the research and development team while the ground floor housed the health and safety officers including the resident nurse. Most of the people working in this building were members of the research project. Although my study took me regularly to various parts of the plant, noise and privacy issues prompted me to conduct most of the formal interviews in my office.

In-house communication technology comprised an internal phone system and a relatively new electronic mail system that many of the staff had not yet mastered. I was linked to both which facilitated communication with participants. Messages were also regularly broadcast over the public address from reception. The system was mainly used for summonsing employees or for conveying messages on behalf of the active recreation club.

The production side of CRL was a 24-hour operation and three shifts operated in the Tank House and the Casting House. For research and development, administration, and personnel the day began at 7.30 in the morning and finished at 4.15 in the afternoon. Almost all the staff worked only the day-shift although this was to change during the time of the mentoring program for the staff of the Casting House.

4.2.3 Background of change

The fortunes of CRL were influenced by factors internal to the plant and the MIM group as a whole, and by factors external to it. Since approximately 50% of the refined copper was sold overseas, copper prices, the comparative value of the Australian dollar, and other international trade conditions affected return. In the past, CRL had been an extremely successful production and technically driven organisation. In the years leading up to the Project, economic and market conditions affecting the company's productivity had dramatically changed. The Australian dollar had been floated in the early 1980s, copper had entered the mature phase of its product life cycle and, in real terms, its price had been falling. Competitors mining new deposits of copper and the coming on the market of new technology that competed with the ISA process were affecting management planning at the time of this study.

Another factor that impacted on the company was the status of MIM Holdings Ltd on the stock market. In the early 1980s MIM was Australia's highest value company and recognised as its best resource company. Since then, MIM's fortunes had declined dramatically. At the time of the Project rumours of possible takeovers were being reported in the media. Well after our research project had begun, the sub-heading of a press article summed up MIM's position as continuing to be dismal:

> MIM is still languishing at the bottom of a big hole although the new chief executive is confident of a renaissance.
>
> (Bruce Jacques, *The Bulletin with Newsweek*, p. 43, 12.3.96)

The perceptions of many Project participants reflected this market sentiment. A supervisor who had worked at the plant for over twenty years summed up the company's situation as follows:

> This company doesn't look very shiny. People aren't knocking down the doors to work in this organisation. People are leaving. We're part of a cost cutting, cost improvement organisation. That's what people see it as, not as a dynamic company to work for.

In response to the changing economic and market conditions, change processes had begun in many aspects of the plant's operation in the five years leading up to the Project. This was especially the case in industrial relations, human resource management, and product quality control. Awards had been restructured, the principles and protocols of Total Quality Management had been introduced, and the structures for self-managed, multi-skilled work teams had been set in place. When our research project began, Quality Assurance procedures were being written and the Personal Action and Development Program that constituted the company's career path plan was being developed. Negotiations in enterprise bargaining that linked salary increases to productivity improvement were also to begin.

In the year before the Project was implemented an eight-member Workplace Change Team had been assembled. Its aim was

> to assist all CRL employees with continuous workplace change, in an effort to develop a culture which will enable all employees to participate in all activities that directly affect their daily work life. (*The Refiner*, December 1994)

The responsibilities of the team included developing an understanding of how the processes needing improvement worked at CRL, benchmarking, identifying problems, and providing solutions to management. Two areas that had been identified for improvement were communication channels and the training process. The Workplace Change Team continued to function during the eighteen months of the research project and two of its members were to become mentors.

Prior to the Project, the last major training program at CRL has taken place four years earlier. At the time, award restructuring had prompted management to analyse the factors that influenced change and how change could best be managed at CRL. The purpose of that professional development program had been two-fold: to develop vision and value statements that would encapsulate what the workers as a whole desired for CRL; and to establish groups which would implement the appropriate change initiatives. The process overall proved unsuccessful and the groups were disbanded.

One of the engineers who participated in the off-site training recalls it as

> a farce really. I know the company spent immense amounts of money ... I went to a three day course on the island to try and determine vision and values. Basically, every work group had to draw up their vision and value statements on what they thought was important to look at for workplace change. And then at the termination of the three days all the managers came along to discuss it. It was terrible in some cases—just a bloody slinging match.... And I haven't seen a vision and values document for two years probably. Everybody read it and nobody took it on board.

From the managers' perspective, the initiative failed for a number of reasons. The intent had been to use a set of vision and value statements to introduce cultural and behavioural change in a workplace. In hindsight, management realised the workplace did not have the appropriate structures in place to support that change and furthermore, the management team itself did not have the necessary skills to manage in a new way. The result was confusion, misunderstandings by workers, managers, and coordinators about what the language of empowerment meant, and expressions of deep cynicism from the workers for a management team whose actions appeared inconsistent with its espoused beliefs. The company's experience of this staff development initiative was to impact on how our project was implemented, especially in terms of its availability to the workforce.

What were regarded as normal interruptions to the business of CRL continued to occur through the research project. A series of stoppages at the Mt Isa copper mine over a period of months affected production and copper had to be bought elsewhere to meet customer commitments. Industrial issues including a freeze on wage reviews arose and were duly resolved. The enterprise bargaining negotiations proved to be a lengthy and time consuming process for the negotiators some of whom were mentors. The Workplace Change Team continued meeting.

A series of unexpected events that began almost at the outset of the Project was to bring about unprecedented change in the organisation and have a profound impact on the mentoring program. When the Project commenced there were few signs that indicated the magnitude and speed of the change that would begin at the worksite within the following eighteen months. These changes were to mean that some business and service areas at CRL would be eliminated altogether. The changes were also to mean that over half of the employees would lose their jobs.

The first event occurred within the Project's first month of operation. Less than one month after our study started, the General Manager, with whom all the negotiations had been made, was seconded to Mt Isa. He had been most enthusiastic about the Project and had wished to personally participate. Although his secondment was to be only a short-term arrangement, he was not to return to CRL. Upon his departure one of the five managers became Acting General Manager until a permanent replacement was made about eight months later.

The second event occurred when, within four months of the Project's commencement, a new Chief Executive Officer for the MIM Holdings Ltd group was appointed. Subsequent to this appointment, the entire Board of Directors was replaced. The prospect of change for the MIM group, including CRL, had now become certain. For many at CRL, change had not been unexpected even if the extent and the time frame had been subject to speculation. The plight of MIM was well-known and some major restructurings within the group had already occurred. It was also common knowledge within the plant that certain aspects of its operation were non-profitable. As one manager put it:

> We've been lucky on this site. When they had all the retrenchment elsewhere, this plant was left alone. We did not have a retrenchment program here. The G. M. had managed to fend them off. And people from the outside have pointed their fingers a lot at how fat and happy we are here at CRL—"They never went through any hurt," etc. So there are perceptions out there.

The appointment of a new General Manager to CRL nine months after the start of the project signalled imminent change. His major task was to oversee an internal review of the operation and the inevitable restructuring. Some job descriptions, priorities, and management practices changed almost immediately. Employees noticed the General Manager's active "out and about" approach to acquainting himself with the plant; the site was being cleared of debris and wastes that had accumulated over periods of many years; the number of management meetings was reduced; and activities considered non-essential such as training and recruiting were also reduced.

Change was also occurring in the Casting House. A $2 million anode pouring system had been installed and some of its production lines were under imminent threat of closure if productivity did not increase. Wire production had already ceased. By this time, staff members associated with the Casting House were required to do shift work. For those who were in the Project, this change made ongoing active participation very difficult and for some, their involvement lapsed.

After several months the internal review of operations temporarily took a back seat to an even greater change agent. A wider Organisation and Business Review conducted by headquarters in Brisbane had taken priority. For two months three CRL employees—all participants in the Project—were seconded to a twelve-member review team comprising representatives of other organisations within the MIM group. Their task was to collect data and make recommendations for change. Employees from most departments and at all levels felt concern because the changes mooted were dramatic and far-reaching. They potentially included the transfer of some functions to other departments at CRL or to other units within the MIM group. The complete closure of some sections was also a possibility.

Fourteen months after the Project started, the sense of uncertainty about job security that had existed earlier intensified. A supervisor of a section summed up the situation as follows:

> We don't know whether he [the General Manager] wants to shut us down, boost us up, or stay as we are.

As the Project progressed, waiting for the outcome of the organisation review continued to be the major preoccupation of those who thought their jobs were at risk. Company morale was low and a common sentiment was expressed by one of the scientists in the program:

> It's just not knowing. That's the worst thing. Just not knowing. Just get it out of the way and get it over and done with, so we can know what's going to happen and then plan accordingly.

Many of those Project members whose job definitions permitted autonomy were not working with their normal enthusiasm as these two participants noted:

> You can understand people slowing down ... they're not going to work their arse off if they're out the gate the next month.

And another:

> If I was to score morale on a scale of 1–10 I would have said anywhere from 2–3. People have collapsed into a sort of apathy. No one seems to give a bugger any more.

On the other hand, some were working extra hard in response to the extra scrutiny, a strategy which one manager explained as follows:

> When their day-to-day things are given a profile, if questions are asked on who survives and who is not going to be here, they can justify their own contribution.

Both responses—that of general apathy or of frenetic activity—adversely affected participation in the Project. As the H R Development Officer explained to me, it was difficult for staff members to engage in professional development that was about personal change over the long-term in circumstances that were making short-term survival tenuous.

By the beginning of the third phase of the Project the outcome of the organisation review became public. Recommendations were implemented and the internal review at CRL recommenced. Meetings resumed; notices pinned on boards declared which sections were to be disbanded; and the General Manager announced the numbers of people to be retrenched in each department. By now the outcome of the internal review held few surprises for much of the workforce. Many carpenters, boilermakers, painters, machinists, and electrical tradesmen were among the first to lose their jobs. Some coordinators and managers would also lose their jobs while others were to be transferred in-house or relocated within the MIM group. The tea-lady had long gone.

The services supplied by the departments that were to close were to be outsourced to the Townsville community or provided by centralised departments within the MIM group. Most of the accounting activities, computing, and H R activities were going to be done by centralised agencies. The library would cease to exist and so, too, the reception area. Entry to the plant was going to be only by the main gate through which the transport trucks passed. Production of rod was also to stop.

The outcome for our Project was early termination. I had been very aware of the general uncertainty concerning the Project—the new General Manager had taken no active interest, participants had voiced their scepticism about the Project's long-term prospects, and Project members' futures at the plant were in doubt.

One manager who had actively participated in the Project explained the Project's relative insignificance in the context of the changes that were occurring:

> How successful my ALE or anyone else's ALE was or how successful the mentors were or anything to do with any of this [the research project] I think has zero impact on any of the outcomes. So it's way over there in terms of

> where things are heading. That doesn't mean that what I have done on this hasn't made me a more capable person.... I feel good about that but I think in the context of the organisation here, in the short term, it has no effect at all.

The Project, which was to have gone for three years, was terminated after eighteen months. After having broken the news to the mentors at one of their regular meetings, the H R Development Officer emailed the following message to the other participants:

> Due to the significant restructuring that has taken place within CRL and the Metals Division, and the changes to individual accountabilities, CRL is no longer able to meet its obligations to the joint research project, and has elected to withdraw from the arrangement.

Within months after the Project's demise approximately two-thirds of the participants were relocated within the MIM group or made redundant. Anticipating retrenchment, some had started leaving the refinery while the Project was still active. Two key members, the H R Manager and the H R Development Officer, were transferred elsewhere in the MIM group.

The extenuating circumstances for the Project's closure did not lessen the sense of frustration and loss I personally felt. Many hours of discussion, personal reflection, and practice had been invested by the participants—especially the mentors—in developing personal and shared understandings of what mentoring meant in their work lives at CRL. A lot of time, effort, and good will had gone into forging the trust and rapport required for a nascent learning community to form. I was also aware of the work that had been done by management and the Chief Investigators in the years leading up to the Project.

4.3 The project context

4.3.1 A shared history

The history shared by the company and the research team that led to the Project began in 1992 when management and other CRL employees attended the Fifth International Conference on Thinking entitled *Exploring Human Potential* in Townsville. At this conference, hosted by James Cook University, John Edwards and Jim Butler, two of the three Chief Investigators in our research team, gave papers on concepts that were to underpin future work with the company. Butler's (1994) model of human action and change which I discussed in Chapter Three and Edwards' research (1994) on teaching thinking, including de Bono's work (1990, 1992) on creative and lateral thinking, became the cornerstones of the professional development training that CRL would later be experiencing. It was Edward's contention that the reflective processes that the Butler model makes essential to the learning process, are enhanced by specific thinking strategies and techniques. Furthermore, these strategies and techniques can be learnt through appropriate training. He argued that not only do such techniques help workers explore their belief systems, but they also help explore that rich and often unarticulated knowledge called personal practical knowledge.

Two years before the Project commenced, CRL hired a team of consultants headed by Edwards and Butler to provide a five-day professional development program to some of their staff. The content and action learning format of that training was the prototype of the intervention used in the Project. Seventeen staff members including the managers participated. All, with the exception of two, subsequently volunteered for the Project with most accepting the role of mentor.

In the year prior to the Project, CRL managers visited a mining site where Edwards and Butler had been conducting a three-year action thinking or action learning professional development program for the total workforce of 180. Qmag near Rockhampton in Central Queensland was a green-field site that produced magnesia. Edwards and Butler's action thinking program was one component of the in-house training developed to provide the foundation for continuous business improvement. According to the General Manager, Barrie Hill, it was paying dividends (Hill, 1994, 1996).

In that year, Edwards also conducted a small action learning pilot study at the copper refinery comprising a triad of a young engineer as mentee, a colleague as observer, and himself as mentor. The role of the observer was to note any change in the mentee's professional performance. The results of that study confirmed for management the potential value of the intervention to the organisation. Both the engineer and his observer, who was another engineer, were to become very active members and mentors in the Project.

These shared experiences led the company and the researchers to collaboratively develop a submission to the Australian Research Council for a joint industry government funded research project. Entitled *Improving Professional Thinking and Performance through an Action Thinking Change Process,* the funding application for the three-year research and professional development project was successful and in 1995 the project began.

4.3.2 The project design

The Project's main research focus concerned the impact of the professional development intervention on participants' professional thinking and performance and especially on personal practical knowledge. The two-part professional development intervention consisted of training workshops at the beginning of each of the three phases and individual action learning projects to be completed during each phase. The principles of action learning used in the Project drew on Revans' (1982) work which stresses the importance of public knowledge—which Revans calls programmed knowledge—and personal practical knowledge—which Revans calls questioning insight—to making deliberate and well-considered changes in professional performance.

The Project was voluntary for all except the managers who were strongly urged by the General Manager to participate. The training consultants' previous experience suggested that the best group composition was a vertical slice of the workforce from manager to operator. For a number of reasons management decided to initially offer the Project to staff members only and this decision was not to change. The experience of the "Vision and Values" training initiative was still painfully vivid and the preferred approach was to tread warily. Management felt it was more prudent to trial the training within a relatively homogeneous small group rather than implementing it as a company-wide initiative. The management team also wanted the staff to have the opportunity and the time to acquire the new skills before the rest of the workforce so that they could act as better role models. The fact that only staff joined the project was to influence the nature of the action learning projects selected and the mentoring program itself.

Over the lifetime of the Project 50 staff members attended at least one training workshop. Only two participants formally withdrew from the project. One cited work and study commitments as the reasons for withdrawal and the other believed he was not benefitting from the Project. The group represented a large diversity in age ranging from young graduates in their early twenties to employees in their fifties, but most participants were in their thirties and forties. A wide range of occupations was also represented. There were engineers, metallurgists, scientists, programmers, accountants, and administrators. Approximately ten per cent were women and this reflected the staff composition. Of the five managers, four became project members and mentors in the project. Comparatively few workers from the production areas, that is, the Tank House and the Casting House, participated in the Project and of those few, most were unable to sustain their commitment.

The three-day workshops at the beginning of each phase provided input on processes, skills, and models that fostered professional development and thinking. The workshop exposed participants to a wide range of skills and models from which they could select the most useful for their individual needs. The content was based on Edwards' research (1994, 1996a, 1996b) that showed the direct teaching of thinking and learning strategies to students or workers improves performance. Senge's work (1992, Senge et al., 1994) on workplace learning, de Bono's (1992) work on thinking, Benner's (1984) on skill development, and Butler's (1994) on the role of reflection in human action and change provided the basis for the creative thinking, problem solving, and continuous improvement skills presented at the workshop. Time management skills, group communication skills, team building, and project management skills were also presented.

The second component of the intervention was an on-the-job action learning project of the participant's choosing. These projects of sixteen- to twenty-week duration were called Action Learning Explorations (ALEs). Participants were to choose an aspect of their professional performance or a problem in their work that required improvement or a solution. The ALE was supposed to work at two levels. At one level, through a process of action and reflection, it was to improve some aspect of professional practice. At another level, it was the vehicle by which participants would gain expertise in the skills and knowledge on thinking and reflection presented at the training workshops. This meant that if a participant completed a project without using any of the new thinking and reflection skills, the objectives of the Project, to a large degree, would not have been met.

In effect, the action learning project was intended to be each individual's own "practice field" (Schein, 1993, 1995) where he could learn, and make errors without fear of penalty. To protect the action learning project's status of "practice field," the project was voluntary, open to modification at any time, and not reportable to one's superiors.

The projects were planned at the workshop. During the workshop participants developed their ALEs with the assistance and feedback of their co-workers. Participants used the skills introduced in the workshop to better help their colleagues clarify goals and improve ALE plans. By the end of the workshop, participants had produced written ALE plans that had been reviewed and modified a number of times with the help of their peers. The final action plan included the project topic; ways in which completion of the project would benefit the participant and the company; action steps required to achieve the goal; a timeline; a monitoring mechanism; and lastly, the support they would access during the process to provide the help they required.

Management and the training consultants agreed that the action learning projects were not to be tied to any existing performance or career development structures. One reason for this decision—a decision which was revisited several times during the life span of the Project—was that the company's Personal Action and Development program was still being fine tuned. The other reason concerned the purpose of the action learning projects. Although successful completion of the projects was desirable, their main function was to serve as vehicles through which participants could engage in continuing cycles of action and reflection on their action. The point of the projects was to provide a psychologically safe environment (Schein, 1993) for participants to experiment, make errors, and to learn from observation and reflection on their performance. It was argued therefore that it would be counterproductive to make the action learning projects subject to any form of company evaluation.

In this Project almost all the ALEs concerned personal professional growth and development even though participants did have the option of selecting technical ALEs. This was in stark contrast to Qmag, the other site at which the consultants had delivered similar professional development training. At Qmag, many employees had selected technical ALEs that dealt with new procedures or technology. They had also chosen projects with tangible and often quantifiable outcomes. Both the participants and the research team attributed the difference in preference to the composition of the groups (at Qmag operators had participated in their training) and to the fact that unlike Qmag, CRL was not a green-field site. In the CRL project most ALEs had to do with time and self-management projects, formal reflection practices such as journalling, communication skills, and administration practices. In comparison with the ALEs undertaken at Qmag, this choice of projects was to make monitoring of progress and quantifying outcomes very difficult at CRL. The choice of ALEs was to have repercussions later for the mentoring program and for management who were to become very concerned about the value of the Project to the organisation.

While specific training for the mentors was delivered in another workshop, the benefits of mentoring and the qualities of a good mentor were discussed with all the participants in the three-day training workshop. In summarising the role of the mentor in the action learning projects, one of the training consultants explained to the participants:

> This is a learning journey we're on. When you go back to work you need help and these are the people who can help you at work. A really good mentor says, "You can do more than you know." Growth is a function of ourselves, but our constraints are our beliefs. Mentors help us to challenge our beliefs.

How mentors were allocated to mentees differed in each phase and thus constitutes part of the narrative in the Chapter Five. In the next section I outline the rationale for the mentoring program and the nature of the mentor training which took place at the beginning of the first two phases (there was no mentor training at the beginning of the third phase). I also record some of the early decisions taken by the group in the first mentor training workshop that were to help shape the program over the eighteen-month period.

4.4 The mentoring program context

The mentoring program was a component in the Project's design from the outset. The company welcomed both the action learning projects and the mentoring program because they promised improved learning opportunities. The copper refinery had entered the research partnership with James Cook University and the University of Queensland because the proposed research project addressed its frustration at the long–term ineffectiveness of much of its staff development training. It had found that, too often, employees did not incorporate into their professional practice the skills, concepts, or tools that had been presented at workshops. Both the action learning projects and the support structure promised better transfer of new knowledge and skills into practice.

While acknowledging that it was a research project, management's expectation for the Project was improved professional performance from participating staff. From the mentoring program specifically management expected three things. It expected skilled mentors to help participants learn from their individual projects. It expected mentors to acquire mentoring expertise they could utilise in the conduct of their everyday work. Upon completion of the three-year project, management expected mentors to be also capable of delivering the training to the rest of the workforce. Because the program terminated prematurely the performance of the program in terms of these three objectives is not considered in this thesis.

The immediate purpose of the mentoring program was to make available to participants a company endorsed support structure that they could access to further their learning in their ALEs. The training consultants' previous experiences with action learning based professional development had shown the need for a support structure. The H R Development Officer who had participated in the five-day professional development program that had been the precursor to this Project recalled that the first four to five weeks immediately after the training were critical. If people had not started working on their ALEs within the first month or so, then it was unlikely that they would pursue them later. It was hoped that interaction with mentors as soon as possible after the workshops would help people actively engage with their ALEs. The benefits of a coach or mentor had also been enthusiastically reported by the young engineer who had regularly met with his mentor—one of the Chief Investigators—on a fortnightly basis in the pilot study.

The H R Development Officer and the Human and Financial Resources Manager selected the mentors in the Project using guidelines provided by the consultants. Mentors were selected based on peer perception of their natural mentoring approach. Natural mentors were described as those who were supportive and encouraging in their interactions with co-workers and to whom others would go to discuss problems. All who were invited to be mentors accepted. In all, sixteen were selected. Four of the mentors were in their mid-twenties, two were in their fifties, and the rest were in their late thirties and forties. Most were in a managerial or supervisory capacity. Because of their position, managers were automatically included in the mentor pool. One mentor was a woman. Some participants had had previous training in coaching either at CRL or elsewhere, but, in the main, the nominated mentors did not have professional development in the area of mentoring. Ten of the mentors started in Phase One of the Project and the remaining six began in Phase Two.

Mentors participated in two-day mentoring workshops. The training identified characteristics of a good mentor and focused on how to negotiate and develop mentoring relationships that accounted for the ALE context and the existing commitments and constraints of the participants. Participants were invited to explore their existing mentoring strengths and weaknesses by reflecting on their past experience. The workshop also included additional work on the skills and models presented in the three-day workshops.

Daloz's (1986) theory on mentoring shaped the notion of mentoring developed at the workshops. Good mentors, Daloz states, do three things effectively: they support the learner, they challenge the learner, and they provide vision. Mentors support their learners by listening actively, by expressing positive expectations of their mentees, and by sharing. In particular, good mentors have the ability to make their mentees feel special.

Challenging the learner is also important. While offering support tends to affirm learners in their current cognitive state, challenging the learner means providing opportunities to generate cognitive dissonance. This means that learners need to be presented with an experience, information, or perception that they cannot accommodate readily in their cognitive schema. To close such gaps, learners are then obliged to go beyond the cognitive structures within which they currently operate. Mentors, Daloz suggests, open gaps and prompt their learners to "raise questions about their ... current world views and invite them to entertain alternatives, to close the dissonance, accommodate their structures, *think* afresh"(p. 223).

In offering the appropriate kinds and amounts of support and challenge to the learner, the mentor is providing vision that comes from "bringing the learner to 'see' a different world than she might otherwise have seen" (Daloz, 1986, p. 224). This can be done in a number of ways such as offering a developmental map, suggesting new language for seeing a situation in a different way, or by providing a mirror to see one's own self in a different way. Successful mentoring encourages the learner to feel that

> it is safe to leave his epistemological "home" and enter another for a while. This is important not because that one is "better" but because in each departure comes the ability to release old knowledge, in each arrival the will to accept new information. (Daloz, 1986, p. 235)

The training consultants summed up these three functions by explaining to the mentors that their purpose in the Project was "to help people grow." To help mentors apply this support-challenge model of mentoring, the skills and concepts taught in the workshops concentrated on developing a cognitive coaching style (Garmston, 1993). This style was consistent with the Project's emphasis on the role of reflection in learning. Garmston describes cognitive coaching with reference to teachers, but any occupational (or professional) group may be inserted in the definition. He explains cognitive coaching as

> a process during which teachers explore their practices. Each person seems to maintain a cognitive map, only partially conscious. In cognitive coaching, questions asked by the coach reveal to the teacher areas of that map that may not be complete or consciously developed. When teachers talk out loud about their thinking, their decisions become clearer to them, and their awareness increases. (1993, p. 57)

Because this approach calls for the coach to have the necessary listening and questioning skills that facilitate reflection on practice, work on these skills was included in the training. However, the mentoring context in this project differed in one major respect from Garmston's coaching context. Unlike the coaches in Garmston's work who observe their learners in action, the mentors in our project were not to observe their mentees at all unless they were requested to do so. Decisions concerning how and when mentors and mentees should meet and the nature of their discussions were left to the participants themselves.

At the first mentoring workshop, the mentors raised and discussed two issues that were destined to become important. These were the use of the term "mentor" and the possibility of the mentors being considered a secret society by the rest of the workforce. Reservations concerning the new language associated with the project especially the term "mentor" prompted the group to consider other terms such as "facilitator," "coach," and "support person." The issue was not resolved at the workshop. The second issue produced less discussion and the group felt that the risk of being labelled a secret society would be diminished if the plant knew about the Project at least in general terms. It was suggested that a general description of the Project be placed in *The Refiner*, the in-house newsletter. This never occurred and twelve months after the Project began, production of *The Refiner* stopped.

One of the final tasks undertaken at that workshop was to discuss the need for a mentor support system back on the plant. The training consultants' advice was that mentors would benefit greatly from being able to share their experiences with other mentors. After some discussion, the ten-strong mentor group decided it would hold a weekly one-hour meeting where mentors would report on their progress, share insights, and learn from one another. Although many aspects of the mentoring program would change over the eighteen months, regular mentor meetings were to continue throughout the life of the Project.

4.5 Existing workplace culture

So far I have described the general contexts in which the mentoring relationships were to develop. When we started, the extent to which the workplace and the Project itself would provide favourable environments for viable mentoring relationships to develop was not certain. There had been no mentoring programs involving mentor–mentee matched relationships in the plant prior to our program. The words "mentor" and "mentoring" were not part of the everyday workplace vocabulary. The extent to which a mentoring style to management and supervision was part of everyday practice was also not known until an interview with a mentor very early in the first phase alerted me to the "unnaturalness" of the mentoring program for at least some participants.

The interview proved to be one of the early "rich points" (Agar, 1996, p. 31) where I encountered an unexpected reaction to the mentoring program. The mentor who was a manager and had worked at the refinery for many years described the first meeting with his two mentees in the following way:

> The first time I had a meeting with John and Paul it was just so bloody alien. We just sat there. It was like pulling your pants down in public, you know. And saying we are going to talk about mentoring ... I didn't want to talk about bloody mentoring for crissake. I wasn't getting paid for that sort of stuff. I said, "How's your projects going?" .... Then I had to get up, I just walked out, growled and grumbled all the way back to the office. Pulled my bloody workbook out and in the back was the mentoring stuff. I says to myself, "I must get back and read that."

The strong discomfort and lack of familiarity with mentoring—or at least formal mentoring—evident in this mentor's experience came as a surprise to me because he, along with the other mentors, had participated enthusiastically in the mentor training workshops. They had appeared to wholeheartedly embrace the philosophy behind mentoring and they had seemed comfortable with the prospect of mentoring their colleagues with their ALEs. Because this interview raised the possibility that mentoring as a style of interaction was foreign to this workplace, I sought out mentors' perceptions on the place mentoring held in their workplace culture.

Some mentors identified pockets within the plant where a mentoring climate seemed to exist and people appeared to support one another. Others spoke of the "unrealised potential" of some staff to be effective mentors. On the whole however, people felt that a mentoring culture did not exist at CRL as the comments below from two of the mentors suggest:

> Absolutely not. Who has mentored me at CRL? Nobody. You just do it. I think maybe because some people have a little bit of self-motivation, a little bit of self-starting get-up-and-go, a little bit of responsibility, they see what needs to be done. They step up to the base plate and get on with the job. But you don't find people mentoring you here.

And the second,

> On a scale of one to ten, we'd be very low on the mentoring scale, only one or two. Really we're only at the stage of a small number of people beginning to understand what it means. At best, the large core of people in leadership positions, like supervisors—we call them coordinators so it's at least changing the language—might have sort of heard about it. But it is something they think will not occur in their lifetime.

Another mentor, a coordinator, agreed that a mentoring style to management was not the norm at CRL. He gave examples of the language used in everyday interactions to do with Health and Safety regulations to illustrate the lack of a mentoring culture at the plant:

> For some time we have been saying to our supervisors, "You shouldn't talk to the guys about safety. You should talk *with* them." So it is a matter of the supervisor talking with him and letting him come to some decisions himself and understanding that you may lead him down the track, but he will come to the understanding himself. He will come to the decision and he will give you a solution to his problem without you telling him. Those cards come in every day, and every day I see on those cards, "Told the guy to ...." We do accident investigations and on 90% of the reports that come in there is a supervisor's decision that says, "This is what I have decided to do...." It is extremely rare that I will have anything like, "Had a discussion with the guy and we decided ...." or "He suggested...." It is always, "I said to do this .... This is what's going to happen ...." It doesn't seem to me that that's an indication that we are mentoring our people.

According to the mentors, the single most important element that constructed the way people interacted with one another in their workplace was the traditional management structure. One of the managers explained how it militated against a mentoring or coaching ethos:

> There are probably a lot of pressures working against us in traditional organisations. There's a lot of pressure on the manager to have all the answers at his fingertips and be completely in control, to be able to give all the responses immediately. This in turn drives that person to exercise that level of control to make sure that he's got those sorts of things. So it's impossible to have a mentoring culture with that directing sort of control approach. I think there's a tendency in that traditional hierarchical type organisation that if you ain't seen as having that knowledge, that power, and able to kick arses as

appropriate, you're seen as a weak manager—at least in organisations in the industry we're in.

The mentors' perceptions suggested a lack of mentoring practices in the workplace. This led me to ask how they might envisage their workplace if mentoring were a norm. I prompted their responses with questions such as: "How do you think CRL will look, if, say, by the year 2010 it was renowned in the industry for its strong mentoring culture?" "What would it be like working here?" "What might a visitor walking around the plant notice?" My purpose in asking these questions was to explore how these workers interpreted mentoring as a practice in their workplace and the kinds of evidence they would use as indicators that mentoring was taking place.

The mentors' responses provided further insights into the nature of the workplace culture at CRL and its readiness for a mentoring program such as the one in the Project. They also revealed participant understandings of what mentoring means in the workplace context. I have reconstructed their responses as a composite extracted from the transcripts. The sketch presented here portrays the mentors' vision of CRL as a mentoring organisation in the year 2010.

> **Envisioning a mentoring culture:** For starters, we'd have far fewer numbers of people in what we call the supervisory ranks. We employ some 460 people and there is probably around 50 of those people in a supervisory role. So currently we use about 50 people on this plant to find all the solutions to our problems. But we have got a potential 460 people to find those solutions and we don't use them. I think we've currently got a ratio of about one supervisor to eight or nine other people on average. I'd be seeing that move to one to twenty-five at a very minimum—or even greater.
>
> If we were mentoring, if we were allowing people to do, if we mentored them in a fashion that allowed them to think, and to act, and to find solutions to our problems, we would without doubt be the world's best producer, and most efficient producer, and most effective producer of refined copper in the world.
>
> I think the level of education if you like of the general workforce would be much greater than what it is now. They would be more skilled in basic mathematics and tools that they need to coordinate their own

level of work. I think there would be a stronger focus by the whole organisation on valuing learning as a key process than there is now. I think there would be a culture of continuous learning and the organisation would value that far more than now....

It would be a place that encourages people to be resourceful, to value what they can do, to understand how they can build on and continuously learn from their experiences. They would understand how to source other people's knowledge as opposed to the traditional approach where the supervisor says, "I'll do the thinking around here. You just do what I tell you to do." And of course, the reverse side of that is we've got people now that say, "I don't have to decide these things—someone else can do that for me." You would see people initiating their own next steps in what's required. Now, people work to a point and wait for someone else to tell them what to do next.

People would be talking with each other, helping each other—instead of defending positions, demarcating areas. That's what a mentoring organisation would be like. We are a long, long way from that.

You'd notice the way people interact with each other would be different from what it is now. A couple of months ago a group of us visited some companies in Melbourne as part of a benchmarking exercise. Before going down, we viewed, on a number of occasions, different videos associated with the STOP program [a safety program]. And I certainly, and most of the others if not all of them, said, "This is shit. Look at the way they are talking to them! That just doesn't happen." Well, we went to Dupont in Melbourne and that's how it *does* happen. The way in which they talk to their people was totally different from the way we talk to our own people. For example, if a person was performing an unsafe act the supervisor would go and talk to him and the guy on the shop floor would be all nice about it, you know, "Oh yes I was doing such and such.... Now what I could have done was this.... Yeah, that's a good idea." That wouldn't happen currently on our plant. There were no harsh words, it was all "nicey nicey." It was unbelievable. By the year 2010 I would hope that's how we would be treating our people. In fact, I hope that's how we would be treating them before the year 2010.

4.6 Conclusion

In the same way that the next chapter is a retrospective reconstruction, so, too, was this chapter. Through narrative and description I have sketched what in hindsight proved to be the more significant situational contexts in which the mentoring program evolved. These contexts pertained to the organisation at that time in its history and to the professional development research project itself. They are significant because they contribute to understanding the uniqueness of the case and hence its capacity for generalisability. They are also significant because they contribute to the verisimilitude (Atkinson, 1990; Denzin, 1997) or vicarious experience that a case study should evoke (Stake, 1994, 1995). Above all, together with the more general contexts outlined in Chapter One, they help establish the relevance of the narrative that unfolds in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Evolution: A stage play

Act I:	Resistance and resolve
Act II:	Chaos and change
Act III:	Diversity and direction
Coda:	Dissolution

Act I: Resistance and resolve

Characters:

Jo, the on-site researcher

Narrator: an imaginary mentor, male

10 mentors: 1 female and 9 males

Sue (mid-twenties)
Russell (late thirties), Acting General Manager
Brian (mid-forties), H R Development Officer and coordinator of the Project
Stan (mid-fifties), Manager
Jack (late fifties)
Jason (mid-thirties)
George (late forties)
Barry (late thirties), Manager
Gerry (late thirties)
Simon (mid-twenties)

John, one of the consultants and Chief Investigators of the research team

14 mentees: 3 females and 11 males

Speaking parts:

Mark (late thirties)
Carl (late twenties)
Linda (early thirties)
Sandra (mid-twenties)
Ted (early fifties)
David (early forties)
Tony (late twenties)
Bert (late twenties)

Scene:

In the middle of the stage is an oval table around which a dozen chairs fit comfortably. A tape recorder is on the table. A chair facing the audience is toward the front of the stage to the left. In a rough semicircle behind the table and in the background are an assortment of chairs, laboratory stools, and some small tables. A spare chair is in the wings.

The mentors (including the narrator) and the researcher are seated at the table. The Chief Investigator is seated in the audience. The mentees are seated, or standing in a relaxed way using the furniture in the background. They are alone or in small groups of two or three. They are in a light shadow to convey that their participation in the project was significantly less than that of the mentors.

The dialogue comprises monologues spoken directly to the audience and flashbacks. The monologues are spoken to the audience by the narrator, the researcher, and individual mentors and mentees. The "time zone" is after the first Phase ended and before the second phase commenced. The flashbacks are segments from the mentor meetings held during Phase One. The text for the flashbacks is indented in the script to indicate it is not in the same "time zone" as the rest of the dialogue.

For the flashbacks the spotlight illuminates the people around the table. In the beginning of the Act, all are illuminated to represent full attendance at the meetings. Half-way through the Act two or three are in shadow, and toward the end about half are in shadow. For the monologues the spotlight illuminates the speaker and the mentors around the table are in shadow.

The transitions from flashbacks to monologues and vice-versa are signalled by a gradual fading of light on the last speaker of a sequence and increasing light on the first speaker of the subsequent sequence. During the monologues, the mentors at the table pretend to continue with their meeting in subdued voices for the couple of moments required for them to go in almost complete darkness.

All the mentees listen with interest to what is being said in both the flashbacks and the monologues. When it's their turn to speak, everyone listens to them except for the people around the oval table who are in another "time zone."

The play opens with characters filing onto the stage and moving to their positions. About half of the mentors and mentees are dressed in the company's uniform and the rest are in good street clothes. The mentors are holding folders and the red "think books" which are the reflection diaries. The narrator is carrying a folder of loose documents.

Act I: Resistance and resolve

(Jo leaves the table and goes to the single chair toward the front of the stage. As she sits down she starts talking to the audience.)

Jo: Twenty-four employees participated in this first phase—ten mentors and fourteen mentees—and the mentoring arrangement was the triad. Most triads consisted of one mentor and two mentees, but some had two mentors and one mentee. This led one mentee to good-naturedly comment that he must have been lucky to have been assigned two mentors. He also went on to say that management must have thought that he was a "slow bugger or something." The eight triads were formed at the workshop and the participants worked together in their small groups of three during the training. The ten mentors were only publicly identified as mentors toward the end of the workshop when their names were written up on a whiteboard. After the workshop, the mentors had their two-day workshop. Back at the workplace, Brian, the H R Development Officer, contacted all the mentees to ensure they knew the names of their mentors and who else was in their triads.

(As Jo returns to the table, the narrator goes to the single chair in the front of the stage. The narrator speaks casually to the audience and only occasionally refers to notes.)

Narrator: The very next week after the training we had our first mentor meeting. Some of us had felt awkward explaining to our co-workers that we had done professional development on thinking. They'd look at us in mocking disbelief and say, "What? You went on a *thinking* junket?" They found it funny to think that we had gone on a workshop that taught us to think. Well, it was even more awkward to now explain that every Friday we were off to a "*mentor* meeting." When asked, we tended to say that it had to do with a university study. Although some of us felt uncomfortable when quizzed by our colleagues who hadn't been on the workshop, we were all very enthusiastic about the program. By that first Friday, most of us had met up with our triads. One of us had already taken under his wing the mentees belonging to a mentor who had gone on his six weeks annual leave.

One of the first things we did as a group was talk about the purpose that our weekly meetings were to have. Jack summed it up for us. He was an engineer and had been at the plant for almost 30 years. He explained that our job as a group was to "keep the spark alive." The spark would die if left to individuals, he said, but as a group we could give one another support. At that stage we did not realise that it would take many months before we came to better understand our purpose or what that spark was supposed to be. At the time all Jack said was that we were not to worry, that the group would find its own level.

What we decided very early was that the main purpose of the meetings was to help us better mentor our mentees. This meant that the mentor meetings were not going to be a regular forum for us to discuss our own action learning projects. The meetings were to discuss how our mentees were doing and how our mentoring was going.

In those early days there was something even more urgent than settling on what our common purpose was. It was deciding whether we should keep the term "mentor" or not. Not all of us felt comfortable with the word.

(Flashback.)

> **Sue:** Am I the only one who has a problem with the word "mentor"? Am I?
>
> **Russell:** Well, it's new. I'm happy to run with it, but I am also happy to look for another word if it better describes what we are doing.
>
> **Brian:** I'm happy with the use of it, but I think it needs to be explained as you use it because people have different versions of what they think a mentor is. I know when we first started talking about mentors, people thought they had to have superior knowledge and everything

else, but the mentor role is a facilitation role, supporting and encouraging.

Sue: I thought I'd just shy away from using it, Brian. I've sort of initiated using the term "support group" for my people. I see my job as facilitating the meetings we're going to have. That sort of thing. I'm going to try and do it that way as opposed to saying, "We're going to have a mentoring session today. I hope you remember," sort of thing.

Stan: I think the word "mentor" best describes what we are doing.

Jack: It's a new word, it's a new role, it's a new thing we're doing.

Russell: Do you know how the mentees feel about the word "mentee"?

Jason: If there's a label we need to change, that's the one we're better off changing.

Russell: Yeah, I think Jason's right.

Sue: That's probably why I was uncomfortable with the name "mentor" because my people weren't happy with the name "mentee."

Russell: Sort of gives the impression of superior ...

Sue: Instead of it being a peer sort of a thing. It makes it sound as if they're there and I'm up here. So I've just shied away from the term.

(Spotlight back on the narrator.)

Narrator: In the end we couldn't think of a better word to use instead of mentor, but we decided not to use it very much. The term "mentee" we thought we'd try to avoid altogether. In any case, we thought that the words were unlikely to crop up outside of our meetings anyway.

We decided early on that we would have proper meeting procedures at our mentor meetings—agendas, minutes, keeping to time, the lot. Running meetings well wasn't something that CRL was generally good at. So we decided that we would use our meetings to help us improve those skills. Recording meeting proceedings was also important because we knew that we would rarely get the full group at a meeting—what with holidays, overseas assignments, and other work commitments. We volunteered George to be the chairperson for the five months or so and the rest of us were to take turns recording the minutes. Within a couple of weeks the computer department had us on an email list so we were able to email agendas and minutes. We agreed that at each meeting we would talk about mentoring and have some sessions on the actual skills that we learnt about in the workshops. Jo was to have a short segment to report on what was happening on the research front. She told us that she would be saying very little at the meetings because her job was to listen. We told her that we thought she'd find that very hard to do.

What we also decided to do was to end our meetings in a special way with a "blue hat" segment. The "blue hat" is one of de Bono's Six Thinking Hats and we used it to signal a group reflection on how the meeting had gone. As time passed, we modified our meeting procedure to try to get more out of the meetings. For example, we found that we would be identifying areas of improvement when we "blue hatted," but we would then do nothing about them. We were reflecting but not changing our practice. So we decided to add action statements to the "blue hat" segment.

To keep the spark alive, we started running lunchtime practice sessions every month or so for all the participants. These sessions were on the different skills we had learnt about at the workshop. A couple of us would volunteer to take the session, We'd book a conference room, and advertise it on the email. We began by concentrating on the various de Bono creative thinking skills. The first one we did was on ideas to help one of the mentors sell his house. Another one was finding creative solutions to a technical problem in the Tank House. There was also one on the big football controversy that was dividing Australian Rugby League fans at the time. Later on we ran lunchtime sessions on reflection. We had about half a dozen of these sessions and they were usually well-attended and good fun. Some of us wondered though whether these sessions actually got people to use the skills more in their everyday work.

The most important way of keeping the spark alive of course was to have been through mentoring our triads. Some triads met as triads, but in other cases the mentor met with the mentees individually. At almost every mentor meeting we would give a report on how the mentoring was going. The chair would call for mentor reports and we'd give a brief summary of the progress that the mentees were making. After about three or four weeks our reports were showing that the mentees were at different stages in their projects.

(Flashback. Most mentors around table are illuminated.)

George: Okay now to the mentor reports. Does anyone have anything to report? Brian?

Brian: With one mentee we're having less frequent meetings. We started off weekly, but now we've decided to meet fortnightly.

Russell: One mentee hasn't shown any desire for real assistance and it's starting to worry me a bit. I've got a feeling she really does need some assistance because things aren't going so well. That's in one case. With the other mentee, he changed his project from the one he had worked on at the training. And every time I talk to him about it he says, "I needed that because I was starting to slacken off." So it's just asking the question.

Barry: I actually touched base with one of mine this morning. He hasn't done anything because he's been in India. He said he hadn't even looked at his project outline. So I said, "You've got to work up your project outline. Perhaps you have to hop onto the computer and use Microsoft Project," I said. "Plug your outline into there." He's got a real thing against computers so I'm trying to get him involved.

Also had a big breakthrough with Phil this morning. We buried his Dominant Idea. We did a "Define the Problem" using PISCO – so we were practising the technique while at the same time using it to clarify his project. We got rid of the bloody robot that he was wanting to design. It's going to surface again but in a different sort of way. It was brilliant stuff this morning. The problem was I did all the bloody talking. But you had to drag him out of this morass that he was in. Anyway, we got on to a roll.

Gerry: One of my mentees is away and the other one is still very much in Quadrant One. We sat down a couple of times this week to resolve why he is in Quadrant One—using those terms. We looked at prioritising things. What he thinks is Quadrant One may not actually be that. It may be a result of the fact that his customer hasn't done the right thing. Most of our discussion was driven by me rather than through his own initiative.

Jack: Mike expects a phone call and my presence up there in his office once a week and he knows that I'm not going away. He treated it as a joke for a while. We both did. But I said that the day will come when we have to stand up and say what we've done. I told him the problems that that had created over on the island the first time I did this training—the embarrassment when we had nothing to report. So I thought of shaming him into it. But he's off to Mexico for a few weeks. And my other mentee has been on holidays.

Narrator: We soon realised that mentoring our people wasn't going to be easy. The question that was forming in most of our minds was: What actually are we mentoring these people in? Part of the problem was the action learning projects. We were having troubles with our own ALEs let alone helping others with theirs. Or to be more precise, we were having trouble in understanding the real point of doing the ALEs. Russell, our Acting General Manager, was the first to raise this concern formally at our meetings.

(Flashback.)

Russell: I'm questioning what it is that we should be putting into practice in these five months apart from doing the specific project. I'm getting the feeling that the ALE members I'm dealing with haven't really got a link between what they did at the workshop and what they are currently doing in their projects. I'm sometimes losing focus myself. I mean my project is getting control of my in-tray. I'm sure I could have had that under control in a week if I had wanted to although I haven't managed it yet. *(Laugh.)* But what I'm trying to say is that there has to be more to this thing than just that.

George: The couple of mentees I've spoken to see the ALE as a task. Get it done, wrap it up, sign it off! But really it is more important I think to be focussing on process, looking at how you do things, how you think, and review things. What ALE they've got is not really that important –the methods and the process are more important. What it's all about is being more conscious and aware of the reflection process.

Sue: It really revolves around that. Reflection is the essential core.

Gerry: Our mentor meetings help me reflect. I think the mentees are missing out on that—the chance to get away from their normal work environment and reflect on really what it's all about, the purpose of it more so than the topic of the project.

Sue: I'm getting a lot of benefit from being mentored by the whole group, but our mentees are being taken over by other priorities.

Russell: That's what I think they're missing out on. And the reason I raised it is as a mentor I feel somehow I need to alert them to that and revive that link. But I wanted to check it out with everyone else here if that's really what we're supposed to be on about. Because I truly think they are doing a task, a job that is seemingly totally unrelated to the workshop.

I wonder if we shouldn't be focussing on the project but on the reflection. Shouldn't we be saying, "So what did you learn from that? And what can you do differently next week to make further progress with your ALE? What skills from the workshop will you be using?"

Brian: It's up to us to make the meetings with our mentees more challenging or invigorating or inviting. If all we do is ask, "How's the ALE going?" and they say, "Good thanks," and you leave it at that then no one gets anything out of it. I think we need to be talking about the skills and the Butler model and how it's being applied.

Sue: I think you're right Russell. I think we're focussing on the wrong thing. What has come out of all this at least for me is the importance of reflection. That's really the main aim. And I think the penny has finally dropped.

Narrator: So we concluded that we needed to focus more on helping our mentees reflect in their projects. We also asked Jo and Brian if they could arrange for John, as consultant, to come out for one of our Friday meetings. We wanted to touch base, make sure that we were on the right track, and talk over with him ideas that we had been tossing around for the next phase. Meanwhile we knew that to help our mentees reflect better we had to learn to be better at reflecting ourselves. We revisited Butler's Thinking Action

Model and Gerry, the computer whiz made it our own by drawing it in colour with a little cartoon. The red "think books" which we had been given at the workshops to write our reflections into were also dusted off. Some of us spoke about reflection with our mentees, but, by then, some mentoring relationships were not really happening.

(Flashback.)

George: Now on to mentor reports.

Sue: I had quite a lengthy chat with Nathan regarding his think book.

Gerry: Mentoring this week has been very slight. Getting one of my mentees motivated is a problem. The other one unexpectedly asked, "Can you help me with my think book?" That was quite a surprise.

Russell: No contact with my triad this week other than a smile down the corridor. One, I suspect, is not going too far. I don't think he's really concerned about it. Last week I had a chat with him and discussed briefly the difficulties he's been having. Basically he just doesn't seem to be motivated to do anything much. Lots of reasons—been busy, someone he needs to consult hasn't been here to talk to. I said, "What would you do if you were to do it all over again? What would you do differently?" And he said, "You mean sort of the reflection bit?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Yeah, I'll think about that." That's really as far as I got. But every time we've had a talk he says, "I feel better now. I'm a bit more motivated again."

Jack: We have a better working relationship because of this. Mike is really keen on the process. He has been attending all the lunchtime workshops.

Brian: With one mentee the mentoring has gone beyond the ALE. It has sort of expanded beyond the project.

Barry: I've nothing to report. Haven't seen my mentees. I haven't gone out of my way to go over and see them. The thing is I work in the Tank House, that's where my job is—in the Tank House. Not walking around the bloody plant talking to mentees. Simple as that. *(Laugh.)* It's true. Haven't got the time. I'm not sitting in R & D—the gap is too large.

Jack: One of my mentees has gone to Mexico. The other one we haven't been meeting. I don't think it's going that well.

Barry: I gave each a copy of the Butler model that Gerry did up on the computer. I'm finding I'm not putting any time into my mentees at all. What I do find is that my job is wide enough that you're in a mentoring role in any event. You're trying to bring the skills on board.

Simon: One mentee is happy to stay with George who looked after him while I was away. The other is out of the country.

Jack: Our meetings have ceased. So we're not going too well. Coming to this meeting is a mentoring session for me. We've got to be honest—we're not going too well in the way it was meant.

(As the narrator speaks, John, the consultant, leaves the audience where he was sitting and walks on to the stage. He sits in the vacant chair at the table. All participants around the table are illuminated.)

Narrator: A couple of weeks after we asked him, John came out to the plant. He had a meeting with all the participants and then he came to our regular meeting. The meeting began with John's report to us.

(Flashback.)

John: Jo passed on to us the transcript of the meeting you had where you talked a lot about the structure of the ALEs. It is obvious that we made an error in the way we set the ALEs up. There wasn't enough emphasis on the skills. So what I want is your feedback on what we're thinking of doing next time. Whether we'll call it a project or not I'd be interested in getting your advice. What we want to do is somehow commit them to an ongoing course of action. And a project is a neat way of encapsulating that. You've got this project to work on and embedded in it are these skills which will improve your practice in a particular way.

You also thought that you could have used more time on learning about writing as a way of reflecting. We probably didn't spend enough time on keeping the think books. The think books are a real problem—it's difficult to know how to get people to keep them. The thing is that getting good at these skills take years—there's no short cuts.

(Table goes into shadow and mentors can be seen talking with John. The spotlight focuses on the narrator.)

Narrator: We spent about half an hour discussing ideas that John had from reading the transcript. It was then our turn to report to him. We had decided earlier that when John came, we would thoroughly review our experience using de Bono's Six Thinking Hats. We thought this would be a very effective way of reflecting and doing some creative thinking about the project. It would allow us to systematically look at the facts, how we had felt about our experiences so far, the good things, and the negative. The technique would also help us creatively think of ways to make the support structure better for next time. Simon, a young metallurgist, ran the session and it took up almost two hours.

(Flashback.)

Jason: Just from being here today John have you got any thoughts on how you think we're going?

John: It's been a really good meeting. It's been a bit too long...

George: Yeah, but that was to impress you. *(All laugh.)*

John: It has been a good meeting. It's been open, there's been humour. The meeting's been very fluid. I think the processes are in good use at the moment. I mean you've got a long way to go, but boy, there's a lot of emphasis here on the thinking that's been used, on reflection. Thinking about the thinking is just not normally on the agenda of most meetings.

(Table goes into shadow as spotlight shifts to narrator. John leaves the same way he came and again becomes part of the audience.)

Narrator: Jo took the minutes of that meeting and over the following weeks we prioritised the items and made up action statements to go with them. This process was put on hold though when Jo reported to the next meeting a concern from a manager who was not yet involved in the project.

(Flashback.)

Jo: Nicholas came to talk to me the other day about secrecy. He knows that I am reporting his concerns to the meeting. He feels that the entire Project is shrouded in secrecy. Managers and supervisors don't know what projects the participants in their sections are working on. *He* doesn't know the projects that the people in his area are working on even though he's the Manager.

Jason: He's never asked. He's never asked me once.

Jo: He thinks that they should know what projects people are doing.

George: Why does he want to know?

Jo: Two reasons. First of all, to see if the project fits into the scheme of things for that section.

Barry: Where it fits with our five year plan.

Jo: And secondly, he felt that, if he knew, then perhaps he would be able to give positive feedback. Or it may become significant when one of his staff is up for appraisal.

Jason: Couldn't he just go and ask?

Stan: I have a concern with it being used for appraisal purposes.

Russell: What would Nicholas have liked done?

Jo: I think he would have liked managers to know what action learning projects are happening in their areas.

Stan: I think that his views probably show a lack of understanding of what we're about. We're really about trying to develop people and it *will have* a general impact of lifting people's standards throughout the plant. Just the fact that you know that people are engaged in a Project designed to help improve their thinking and performance is probably, in my opinion, enough without knowing the details of what they're working on.

Gerry: There is a real problem with what Nicholas is proposing of course. At the end of the week or month he asks, "What did you do? How did you go?" And you say, "I didn't do it. I didn't finish it." The immediate thought in his mind would be, "He's failed." But not knowing the philosophy that we have been wrestling with he could have completely the wrong idea.

Jack: I think the point is that it's a self-development program.

Jason: Learning how to learn.

Jo: That was one issue. The other was what he called the "secret meetings" that are happening here every Friday. My concern is that if that's what Nicholas thinks then maybe there are other people on the plant that have the same impression.

Jack: I can relate to the secrecy thing. It becomes embarrassing after a while when you're asked where are you going. "We're going to thinking this afternoon." "We're going to a mentor or mentee meeting." And I'm just sick of defending it. When people who want to question it have got the time to sit down and listen, I give it to them with both barrels. But it's very difficult to explain to another person what we do in this room for this one hour. I don't want to have to defend it.

Stan: I just tell people it's something that's new we're developing. It's something to improve our professional performance and that of others.

Narrator: We didn't really know how to handle the secrecy issue. Even before Jo brought up the problem we had spoken a number of times about having our mentor meetings open to anyone who wished to attend. But we hadn't done anything about that. What we did do this time was to help Russell draft a two-page description of what the project was about. This was to be given out to all participants and to prospective participants. It was also something we could give to anyone who wanted to know about it. It was in a simple question answer format. *(Opens folder, finds document and reads from it.)* What is the Project? Why is CRL involved? Who's paying? How long will it last? What's involved in the Project? Why are people involved in the Project meeting together? Who's involved? *(Closes folder.)* There was some debate about listing the names of the people involved like we do in the other training courses people go on. We decided that, in this case, names would not be included except for Brian's as the contact. There was also some debate about whether we should include some mention of the mentor group. In the end, we decided not to use the term "mentor." We said that there was a support group on the plant.

Meanwhile the mentor reports at our meetings were showing that not much support was going on even though our weekly meetings were still happening.

(Flashback.)

> **George:** Do we have any mentor reports?
>
> **Sue:** I meet with my people frequently on an informal basis. They're not making any progress on their projects. But I'm not worried about that because we're focussing on reflection on making sure that we're all thinking about why we're doing the things we're doing and why they're happening the way they're happening. Learning how to reflect properly is the goal. So I'm not worried about the projects. We haven't even talked about the ALEs for a good couple of weeks.
>
> **Gerry:** The reflective process doesn't seem to be of paramount importance for my mentees. The projects are. But in the last few weeks even that seems to have flattened out—it seems to have tapered off rather than coming to a crescendo.
>
> **Jack:** I have not done any mentoring with my mentees for five or six weeks.
>
> **Russell:** I had some contact with a mentee this week and started talking about the presentation of his project at Celebration Day. His project didn't go anywhere. Someone else in his section was already doing something very similar. So not much point. I don't think he really did anything with his project. I don't think he really thought about it much. I think it was only when I came sniffing around asking how things were going that he thought about it. What he did say was that he sort of feels that he is in a bit of a vacuum. Geographically speaking there's no one in the area that's in the Project. There is no one around that he can even talk to about it. There's no one there who can talk the same language.

Narrator: In the last month or so of the first phase we systematically worked through the ideas we had come up with in our think-tank when John had visited us. We knew we had not been very successful, but we had lots of suggestions to give Brian to pass on to the consultants about how things could be improved for the next phase.

The mentor reports continued to be an item at most meetings. Toward the end we became more open in talking about our mentoring efforts—or lack of them. Most of us had actually stopped even broaching the topic with our mentees.

(Flashback.)

> **Russell:** I've been listening to the mentor reports and I just want to make a general comment here. I'm wondering whether you feel you have made a positive contribution to helping others in this program to date. Because I have a frustrating feeling that I haven't made much bloody difference at all.
>
> **George:** Yeah, I'd say that.
>
> **Sue:** I'd have to say the same.
>
> **Stan:** I'm not sure but I have to say that they mentor me as much as I mentor them. And I reckon it's made me a lot more aware of the opportunities to mentor in my everyday work.
>
> **Jo:** You have spoken often about how difficult mentoring is in this project. Can we talk about why it is so hard?
>
> **Stan:** The hardest part about it comes from being put into a formal sort of task oriented role where you're sort of saying, "I shall now mentor."
>
> **George:** For me to mentor Steve, say, I have to specifically seek him out and get the discussion going.
>
> **Stan:** It's not only that—it's mentoring on a specific topic that also makes it hard. I think most mentoring happens when people are interacting or working together on projects or goals or involved together. It's hard to step in and start mentoring with someone you really don't know very well, or their background, or where they're

coming from. It's the people that you have a fair amount of work to do with, and interaction with, and to some extent common goals that's the area where you naturally tend to do a lot of your mentoring.

George: In Gerry's case he's got his mentees right in his front yard. At any time Gerry can pick up one of the skills available to do mentoring with one of his mentees even it is completely unassociated with the guy's ALE.

Gerry: That's true but as soon as I mention the ALE it becomes awkward. I get the feeling that, "I am now the policeman. Where are you at? Why haven't you ...?" I don't like that feeling. I had a long chat last night with my two mentees and we actually talked about that. They felt much the same as I did. The mentoring and the coaching seemed more comfortable on a non-ALE project than on a specific ALE project. I think it's because it's a special event as opposed to a regular daily feedback session, discussion session, problem solving type session, or whatever.

Sue: I get great benefit out of my sessions with Jo. I find them hugely beneficial but I don't seem to be able to do the same thing with the people I'm supposed to be mentoring. It just doesn't flow—I don't know why. Maybe I'm just not the right sort of person to be doing it. I have a lot of trouble getting them to think about what they're doing. "Oh I'm just too busy" or "I've got to go away next week" or "I'm working in Quadrant One because we've got an oil spill down the back and I've just got to go down there and clean it up" or "I don't have time to do my project any more."

Russell: What I think is difficult for me is that the mentees do not appear to have a clear direction of what they're about. All they seem to be seeing the ALE as is a job or a task to do. And one of my mentees is not even doing that. If there was a clear direction and purpose and they knew what it was, and I knew what it was, I think it would be much easier to give assistance and encouragement and play a mentoring role. It's very difficult to give that assistance to somebody who I think just doesn't have a clue where it all fits.

Jason: I think as mentors we are also learning and struggling ourselves. And mentoring has taken a back seat to our think books and our own personal ALEs. It has with me. But I suppose we are co-mentoring each other in this room.

(Mentor group goes into darkness and weak light floods the mentees. Spotlight is directed toward the speakers who are scattered throughout the mentee group. Speakers stand and move forward a step when they speak.)

Mark: In our case we started meeting every Friday. That went on for a while but then it petered out. As much as I like my mentor, I was slightly unimpressed. My idea of mentoring is that the mentor is supposed to help in the development of the mentee—if there is such a word—by creating the environment for that development.

Now that's what I do when I take on the role of mentor. And I do that, not officially, but I do it with a number of people on this site who are seen as my opposition when we get to the negotiating table. You see by making them better at what they do as union delegates, our talks become more productive. Now that's the role I play if I decide that a person's worth developing. That's not what happened with me. He'd just ask, "How are you going? What have you done? Blah, blah, blah," and that's it. *(Pause.)*

The thought did cross my mind to tell him that it wasn't doing much good. But as I said, I like him very much. Mind you, we argue every time we meet but we are still friends. And he took his mentoring quite seriously so I didn't want to say, "Hey, you are stuffing it up." But to be quite honest, it wasted my Fridays from 1:00 to 1:30.

Carl: Nothing special came out of the mentoring for me. I didn't have one mentoring session where I left all fired up about the ALE again. We had several triad meetings but my feeling was that they were just another meeting that we had to attend. When I was talking about my ALE I got the impression that everyone was listening but they weren't truly interested because they also had their own ALEs. And that's the way I felt when they were talking to me about theirs as well. In the short period of time we had all we did really was just give summaries of what we'd done. So I think it really didn't work out.

Linda: People in my triad were not people that I regularly talked with anyway. That made things a little bit awkward. The people that I naturally fall back on are people that I get on well with, that I see a lot of. In putting people in groups, and forcing them to have a mentor and a triad partner whom they don't normally speak with, or have a lot to do with, probably made things a little bit hard.

Sandra: Personally I thought the mentoring was really good. He showed a lot of interest and I think having someone like that pushes you along. If there wasn't that kind of interest you wouldn't be as eager to do your ALE or as eager to achieve anything out of it.

Ted: When I think of my mentoring experience as it related directly to the project, it was almost a non-event. We didn't meet very often but I don't think it would have helped greatly anyway. I think the mentors themselves were probably at a similar stage to us trying to come to grips with the purpose of this whole project. So I didn't feel very confident in their own knowledge about the process.

Narrator: In the last few weeks some of us stopped coming to the Friday meetings altogether. Five or six was the usual number of mentors turning up to meetings. At our last meeting, Jo told us that the new participants were wanting to hear about our experiences. So she asked whether anyone of us—with perhaps some of our mentees—would be happy to talk about our experiences at the workshops coming up. We didn't feel comfortable about doing that. Anyway, Jo's request led to a lengthy discussion and debate amongst us on what mentoring was all about. We had never had such a debate before.

(Flashback. Most mentors at the table are in shadow.)

> **Sue:** I don't think I should talk about our mentoring relationship. I see a true mentor like a demigod sort of thing—you know, someone who knows everything, who knows the best for you, and has only your best intentions at heart. The relationship I had with my people wasn't that sort of thing. Our relationship was really based on mutual emotional support. And you know what concerns me? I am going to be totally and brutally honest here. It concerns me that if we were to talk to the group about our mentoring relationship it's going to come

across that it's only because we are female that we need emotional support. *(Mumbling as other mentors deny it.)* Because no one else here has ever expressed the need for emotional support except me and it concerns me that it's going to be construed as just a female thing.

Jack: Even if it is, don't make any apologies for it.

Sue: But I don't think it *is* just a female thing.

Jack: I was about to say something before you started talking and I thought, "Gee, I'm glad I didn't say that." *(Big laugh from everyone.)* But I did think—I never asked you how old you are Sue, but I've got a rough idea—I did wonder if this mentoring process is a function of age, with all due respect to mine and other people's ages. I think it would be very difficult for someone, say, who's 21 suddenly to start mentoring. It would be near impossible for someone of 21 to mentor, say, someone in their 30s. I wonder what your comments about age would be.

Sue: I think it depends on what sort of support the person is looking for.

Jack: Experience is probably a better word than age.

Sue: Not even that.

Russell: I don't think it's age. I think it's knowledge and experience.

Stan: Yeah, but a lot of knowledge and experience often goes with age. I know it's not necessarily so...

Russell: I'll give you an example. If I just took up golf and I knew a young kid of 21 who's playing a handicap of two. I think he could very effectively mentor me in golf because he has had a lot experience in that field.

Jack: Assuming he wasn't a little smart arse. But if he was that way inclined, yes, he would be a good mentor.

Stan: Your point is taken. It's true if it's in a specific field, but if it's issues of life...

Simon: The other thing with that example, Russell, is that you know that the 21 year-old is a good golfer already. I see sometimes in my work here that I am overlooked because of my age—because of the fact that I haven't been here for 20 years, 10 years, or whatever. I've got three years experience, but that doesn't mean I don't have a lot of ideas and information in my head that I've gained in the 24 years I've been alive. And sometimes that is neglected. You don't even get asked. I personally find it very hard to mentor someone older than me.

Jason: It depends on what the person is looking for. If someone is looking for someone to listen to them, to empathise with them, boost up their confidence, then I'm good at that. But if someone was to ask me what their next step in their career should be I would be bloody hopeless.

Stan: It's sort of a narrow field of mentoring. I mean teaching somebody skills...

Simon: Is mentoring teaching skills?

Stan: A narrow aspect of it. An important aspect, but a very narrow aspect. It's a part of mentoring, but it's not the dominant part.

Sue: The main thing I was trying to get across was that different personalities need different mentoring. And different types of support. I don't think I have a true mentor in the way you guys talk of people. I have really good friends I can rely on who boost me up and people I can ring up who can tell by the sound of my voice whether I'm up, I'm down, whether I need boosting, or whether I need to be brought down a few pegs. They're the sort of people I rely on—they're my support structure.

Russell: I think mentoring is more than that. A true mentor in my view is somebody who's there, who's actively barracking for you to succeed. It's not just somebody to bandaid you. That might be an aspect required from time to time. But it's more than that.

Sue: I don't really need somebody to barrack for me Russell. I set my goals up here and I set my standards in the same place. I'm already pushing myself hard enough. I know where I want to go.

Russell: Say a blockage comes up? A true mentor is there actively helping you to get around or shift that barrier for you.

Brian: A mentor is somebody going in to bat for you.

Sue: Some of my friends do that as well.

Russell: I think you're wrong in saying, "I know where I've got to go and I don't need help in that area."

Sue: What I am saying Russell is that I recognise I'm very strong-willed and whether I be right or wrong, no one can tell me where I should be heading. I'm very strong willed on that point.

Stan *(pensive)*: Mmm.

Russell: Yes, but it's how you get there. That's what I'm talking about.

Sue: That's right.

Russell: You know where you want to go, but you might not know how to bloody well get there. A true mentor would say, "Look I've got some experience." He wouldn't say it this way, but basically the experience is there and he'd say, "Don't take that path, but try this one here, or this one here."

Stan: Yeah, but even if they didn't know which way to go, the very fact that they boost your morale, make you feel better, and put you in the mood that says, "I can do it!" Even if they don't know, it would still be a mentoring thing.

Simon: Unless I really trusted someone I wouldn't believe that they were offering me support in my best interest. How can you Stan possibly know what is best for my career development if you don't know me really well, if you don't know what my strengths are, or my weaknesses, what my personality is like, what I'm good at, what I'm not, all those sorts of things?

Stan: I'd probably just ask you questions that would make you think.

Sue: I probably wouldn't tell you if I didn't know you well enough.

Stan: You wouldn't have to give me answers. I could say, "Have you considered this?" Or I'd suggest that one possibility worth thinking about might be this. There's a certain book here that might be worth reading.

Sue *(doubting)***:** Maybe.

Brian: I don't have to come to that understanding. But I can facilitate you to come to that understanding. That's the most important thing. I don't have to have in-depth knowledge for that as long as I ask the right questions and have the right techniques for you to generate those answers to make those decisions. Then that's the mentoring I can do.

Stan: Just listening to what you said one of the prime attributes of successful mentoring is trust. If that's not there....

Sue: Yes, yes. Well, that's true for me.

Stan: Well, I think that's true for just about anybody.

Russell: I think mentoring is more than just supporting someone to get where they want to go. I think it's about leading people in areas where they would not have otherwise gone.

Sue: I wouldn't want that Russell. I would not want to be led.

Stan: No, no, maybe not "led" but offering challenging ideas sort of thing.

Sue: I don't know how receptive I would be to that.

Brian: That's right. That would be mentor driven.

Stan: Yeah, but if you had the right kind of mentoring relationship you'd just say that that's not where you would want to go. And the mentor might say, "Why not? Have you considered it?"

Brian: That could be a strength or it could be a weakness. I guess the role of the mentor would be to challenge that with you, to open up other possibilities. Is that the way you want to go? And act as a sounding board, holding up the mirror. That would be the role of the mentor, to challenge those ideas. That's how I see the mentoring role. They might not have all the answers, but you can use them just to sound you out, test you out, that you are confident of your stuff, that it's the right way to go.

Sue *(jokingly)*: So who wants to mentor me? *(Big laugh from many.)*

Barry *(mock horror)*: Shit, not me.

Gerry *(laughing)*: No fear.

Jack *(quietly)*: You're getting mentored without you even knowing it.

Narrator: That discussion on mentoring was how we ended our last meeting in the first phase. We agreed that it was the most significant debate we had had on mentoring in the whole five months we had been meeting. At the end of it all we got back to Jo's request and agreed that it *was* important to share and reflect on our PPK with the new mentors. What we didn't want to do was to have the spotlight on a specific triad. So we decided that we'd have a similar discussion at the workshop to the one we had at the meeting. That way we would get the experience on the table without anyone feeling targeted.

Those five months had been a big learning curve for us. As Brian had said at one of the meetings there was no sheet on how it was to be done and to a large extent we were learning as we went along. Despite our lack of success all of us remained in the mentor group for Round Two and we looked forward to the changes that we thought would improve the support structure. We also felt that the Project had already been responsible for improvements, maybe only small ones, in the way we did things on the plant. So it was worth the effort.

Although we knew more at the end than when we had started we did not want to impose the system that we had developed – like the meetings and the lunch time sessions—on the new mentors who would be joining us. So beginning with Meeting One Phase Two, everything would be thrown up for renegotiation – how meetings were to be run, how often they should be held, whether we should continue with the word "mentor", the lot.

(Jo leaves the table and goes to the chair that the narrator has vacated. The narrator exits the stage.)

Jo: Like the mentors, I, too, thought that last conversation on mentoring had been very significant. It raised a lot of questions. So why did it take five months of weekly meetings for the group to get to the point they could share their ideas on what mentoring meant to them? How come it took so long?

Had the time been needed to come to understand what mentoring meant? Or was all that time needed before they could trust one another? And if that was the case, what hope had the triads of building the necessary trust for real dialogue to happen? And talking of the triads, why was it that in the twenty minutes that the discussion flowed, not once—not even once—did the conversation return to the action learning projects?

For me that conversation confirmed what I had heard and felt over and over in the meetings and almost all the interviews. For the most part, the contexts that the mentoring program had set up were simply not conducive to forming viable mentoring relationships.

The feedback from the participants on Celebration Day reconfirmed this. The mentees were not shy in coming forward to express their views.

(Jo stands, takes the chair, and moves off stage. The whole participant group—mentors and mentees—are facing the audience. All are illuminated. Mentees stand and move forward a step when they speak.)

Mark: Well, what I said in no uncertain terms at the Celebration Day was that I found the mentoring system bloody useless. The mentoring appeared to focus on the actual projects rather than developing skills. The support they gave me was, "Get that done!" Fine. The support I wanted was to develop these thinking and reflection skills from the workshop. That didn't happen.

David: I agree. It was good that they showed interest. But it was geared toward the ALE. In my particular case, although he checked up on me, there was no giving of himself to me. There was no giving of himself. You know what I mean? Previous mentors I have had over the years have been in natural workgroups where they were my supervisors and they were interested in developing me in many ways, my skills as well.

Tony *(sounding uncomfortable)*: I felt that it wasn't really appropriate that my supervisor was my mentor for this project. I tend to think I sort of wanted somebody who was on the front line with me, but who has been there longer. Someone like Nigel. He's been there for, I don't know how long, at least twelve years or so. Gerry has been in the section only as a manager and that's been for only six years or something. Maybe more, maybe less, but he really doesn't know I don't think what goes on. He might, but I don't think he knows it to the full extent whereas someone like Nigel does.

Stan: I think quite a lot of the ALEs selected were inappropriate for the mentoring process. They didn't really need me to assist them to do their ALE. So I didn't spend much time mentoring at all.

Bert: I struggled with this mentoring thing right from the very beginning. When the names of the mentor group were put up on the board, I thought, "I do not feel comfortable going to any of them."

Simon: Everybody thought that a support structure should give moral support as well having someone to bounce things off. I'm not sure whether either happened much in any of the triads. I'm not even sure whether the word "mentor" was really the right word for it. I don't feel I've been a mentor.

END OF ACT I

Act II: Change and chaos

Characters:

Jo, the on-site researcher

Narrator, the same narrator as in Act I

15 mentors: 6 males in addition to the 10 mentors from Act I

Arthur (early fifties)
Craig (late forties)
Phil (mid-forties)
Tim (late twenties)
Nicholas (early forties), Manager
Julian (late twenties)

Audrey, a female mentee in her early fifties

Ben, a male mentee in his early thirties

Scene:

A larger table than the one in Act I is in the middle of the stage. A tape recorder is on the table. Seventeen chairs are arranged around the table. A chair facing the audience is in front of the stage to the left. In a rough semicircle behind the table and in the background are the same chairs, lab stools, and small tables as in Act I.

The mentors including the narrator and the researcher are seated around the table. The two mentees are off stage.

The chairs and stools in the background remain vacant for the entire Act.

The dialogue comprises monologues spoken directly to the audience and flashbacks. The monologues are spoken by the narrator and the researcher. The "time zone" for the monologues is after the second phase ended and before the third phase commenced. The flashbacks are segments from mentor meetings held during Phase Two.

For the flashbacks the spotlight illuminates the people around the table. The whole group is never entirely illuminated to indicate poor attendance. Stan is in shadow for the whole Act. Unless indicated otherwise, approximately half the group is illuminated in the flashbacks. For the monologues the spotlight shines on the speaker.

The play opens with the mentors and the researcher, entering the stage and moving to the table. They sit down. About half of the mentors are dressed in the company's uniform and the rest are in street clothes.

Act II: Change and chaos

(Jo goes to the single chair toward the front of the stage.)

Jo: In this second phase thirty-nine employees participated in the workshops. Sixteen were mentors. The new participants had their own workshop and the mentors again had a workshop. The mentoring arrangements set up at the workshops were different from those of Phase One. The mentor–mentee dyad replaced the triad and this time, the matching process involved participants selecting their mentors. The mentors were to be selected preferably from the pool of sixteen and it was not obligatory to nominate a mentor. The listed mentors could also nominate a mentor for themselves. Most of the mentees who had experienced the triad arrangement in the first phase did not opt for mentoring. The new participants, on the other hand, did choose to be in mentoring dyads.

Five ALE support groups based around different professional development interests were also formed. All participants, including the mentors, were allocated to one of the five support groups. As well as the support groups, three skill development groups for the mentors were formed. It was Brian's job to call the first meeting of each of the support groups and skill groups.

(As Jo returns to the table, the narrator gets up and goes to the single chair toward the front of the stage. The narrator speaks casually and occasionally refers to notes, minutes of meetings, or other documents in his folder.)

Narrator: In the first phase we had been using the small conference room. The eleven of us fitted nicely around the silky oak table. In the second phase there were more of us so we decided to hold our meetings—which we agreed should continue on a weekly basis—in one of the training rooms in the Machine Shop. We really need not have bothered. Right from the start we had problems with poor meeting attendance.

What dogged us from the start was a lack of direction or common purpose. The mentoring structures that had been set up at the training sessions did not make our purpose as clear cut as before.

(Flashback.)

> **Sue:** Maybe we should make a concerted effort to get everyone here at a meeting to discuss what the purpose of these meetings is and what it is we want to get out of them.
>
> **Brian:** That's the first step.
>
> **Arthur:** Somehow these meetings don't have the flavour of a mentor meeting. They're like any other meeting. To me the meetings should be an example of what action thinking in practice is.
>
> **Russell:** As a new mentor what were you expecting to see?

Arthur: I expected to see a group of people at this point in time who are reasonably skilled in the mentoring process and in the use of the tools. I imagined the actual meeting would include the use of those tools. I thought in coming along I would start using them as well. These meetings would nurture me and give me access and entry to the process. I imagined this group would be an example to the rest of the plant of how things should be working.

Sue: I don't think we can be that good in such a short time. We are still new at it, but what we should be doing is making sure that there are avenues for everyone to be practising the skills.

George: I remember Simon saying at one of our meetings that we are still not using those skills automatically. That's to be expected. We've got to remember this project is a three-year project. I think it's too early to expect to be slipping into these skills as easily as slipping into our undies.

Russell: I'm a little confused now as to what the structure actually is. As far as I know I have no appointed mentees.

George: My understanding Russell is, if you haven't been approached, you don't have a mentee.

Jason: If I've got this right could I end up with six things: an ALE, this mentor meeting, an ALE support group, a mentor skill group, a mentor, and a mentee?

George: Are we expected to be running the ALE support groups?

Brian: We'll see what each group wants at the first meeting.

Sue: We're going to have a big job ahead just coordinating it all. To make sure it keeps happening.

George: I don't know how we are going to be doing it all.

Russell: I think the nature and purpose of this group has changed. No longer are we here to just mentor on a one-to-one level. Our new role is really to mentor the entire process.

Sue: Well, that's how I'm seeing it because I don't have any mentees this time.

Russell: I'm waiting for my mentee to sneak up on me.

Jason: My mentee approached me on a Tuesday two days after the workshop. We're having our second meeting this afternoon.

Narrator: It took four weeks after getting back from the workshop before the purpose of the mentor group was put on the agenda as an item for discussion. *(Reading from the minutes.)* The minutes for that meeting list the three purposes we agreed on. The first purpose we said was "to help each other become better mentors." The second was "to monitor and steer the professional development process" and our third purpose was "to improve the mentors' skills capabilities." It took another four weeks of discussion to produce a set of action statements for each of the three purpose statements.

Almost as soon as we had formulated those three statements there was dissent. At the very next meeting we were almost back to square one with someone saying that we had lost the focus on reflection. He reminded us that reflection was the point of the Project. That was what we had decided in the first round. By then the confusion caused us to lose two of our new mentors.

(Flashback to the meeting. Craig and Phil are at one end of the table.)

Craig: Quite frankly I don't understand what's happening here. You know it's just, it seems like, as if I'm, you know, I'm on the wrong channel or something. Even when I read the minutes it doesn't make sense. I can't understand the process that's happening here. Maybe I'm more of a nuts and bolts person who needs it clearer or simpler, but it's making no sense to me. I'm sort of lost, I don't know the purpose, I don't know where it's heading.

Phil: I'll be looking very carefully at the agenda before I decide to come to any more meetings.

(As the narrator begins to speak, Craig and Phil quietly and amicably leave the table and exit the stage. They don't return.)

Narrator: The idea of the purpose statements had been to provide a guide for what we should have been doing as mentors and what we should have been doing at the meetings. Up to a point they did do this.

The statement about monitoring and steering captured our attention almost immediately and became our preoccupation for weeks. This may have been because a new general manger had been appointed and there was word that budgets were going to be slashed. The problem was that monitoring had become almost impossible because most of us were not actually mentoring anybody. Most of us weren't even involved in the ALE support groups. We decided to design a survey asking how the group thought they were progressing with their skill development. We decided to trial it amongst ourselves. The results showed that we thought we were doing OK. We planned for the whole group to fill it out at the end of the year. This never happened.

To meet the other two purpose statements we did pretty much what we did the first time round. Some of us gave presentations on the skills and these were open to anyone who was interested in coming. We started developing a tool kit of information about the different skills. Copies were distributed to all participants and copies were kept in the library. Brian also ordered books and these were borrowed as soon as they hit the shelves.

As in the first round, mentor reports were to be a regular item for the agenda. One of the mentors from the first round had suggested early on changing the format of how we reported on our mentoring. Instead of just sharing what had happened and moving on from one to the next, he thought that doing case studies of the reports would have been useful. This never happened.

It took eight meetings before we got round to giving the first mentor reports.

(Flashback.)

> **George:** Let's start with the ALE support groups.
>
> **Tim**: Jo suggested yesterday that I explain at this meeting how our group works. The structure of our meeting has been developing fortnight to fortnight. Basically we have fortnightly meetings always at the same time in the same room, the R & D meeting room. I actually call the meetings. I send off an email. We have about seven members in our group. Four are regulars. What has surprised me is that people

are ringing up to apologise if they aren't coming. I think that is a good sign.

When we arrive we have the usual four questions that are answered by each of the members: What has your progress been for the fortnight? What have you learnt? What support do you need from other members from the rest of the group? What are your goals for the next fortnight? I take note of those goals. We come back to them at the following fortnight's meeting. Most of the ALEs have got to do with time management.

So far it's been working quite well. From my point of view I think everyone in the group is actually making progress which is good.

Arthur: I'm in that group and I find the format very comfortable to work with. By default Tim is chairing the process and we are virtually questioning each other on what we are doing. We use it more as a report back, discussion, planning process. I find the time well spent.

Tim: Probably the biggest plus is we have managed to keep it fairly informal but pretty much to the point and I think everyone appreciates that.

Jason: Can I join your group? *(General laugh.)*

Nicholas: I really like the sound of what you're doing. Because I think what this is about is people diligently working on their ALES. And the two key methods we're using to try to ensure that people are working on their ALEs are through the one-on-one and the ALE support groups.

With the ALE support group I was assigned to, I've delegated the responsibility of calling meetings to one of the participants. I'm not up to date with what has been happening there.

George: No other ALE support group reports? Right, now for mentor reports.

Nicholas: I've only had one ALE participant to directly target as mentor. I tried once to get a commitment to sit down and have a go talking about it at least status wise. But the person was too busy at the time so I didn't push it. So I still haven't been active as a mentor and there hasn't been any asking for help either. So it's really a situation of trying to find myself in there, but not intrusively. And I really haven't had time to do that.

Jason: Ditto for me. I started off pretty gung-ho with the person who actually selected me. We had two meetings and I found very early in the piece that I had to pull my own reins in because I was tempted to become very prescriptive which perhaps is something that a mentor should not do. I was getting involved in the problem, in his problem, in our problem. The thing is though, we haven't linked up since, and I feel guilty that my mentee might have the feeling that I don't care. I feel bad we haven't linked up, but he's been quite busy as have I with other things.

Narrator: We didn't end up having mentor reports often. At most, it was three or four times in the whole six months.

Four months after the training we were in crisis—again. Once more we seemed to have lost our way. Meeting attendance had been dropping off badly and, so too, had our sense of common purpose.

Admittedly, negotiations around the enterprise bargaining agreement had been taking a lot of time, but that was affecting only two or three mentors. It did not explain the poor attendance of the rest of us.

A new general manager had also been appointed around that time and there was a sense of wariness about the plant—hard to describe it. Russell, who had been the Acting General Manager, was back to his old position of Human and Financial Resources Manager.

At one of the mentor meetings, where there were only five of us, we talked about this lack of direction. That discussion prompted us to put on the next meeting's agenda three questions for people to think about. (*Narrator looks in the folder, finds the agenda, and reads from it.*) Those questions were: What is happening? Where are we going? Do we need help? When George announced the item, no prompting was needed to get us talking. There were quite a few us at that meeting, and more than ever before, we expressed what we were thinking. It was at that meeting that we asked ourselves whether we should stop having our Friday meetings altogether. We had never voiced that possibility before.

(Flashback. About three-quarters of the group is illuminated. Jo is in shadow to signify she is absent.)

George: Passing just a general comment, I think the whole professional development thing is starting to sink.

Sue: I think it's lost focus. We're diddling around. We don't know what we're doing. I'm not getting anything out of it any more. As simple as that.

Jack: I disagree about you not getting anything out of it. I was at a meeting you ran yesterday. I could see this stuff right through it. It was brilliant.

Sue: I'm not saying I'm getting nothing out of the Action Thinking Project. I'm getting nothing out of the mentor meetings.

Jason: I think it's time now for another get-together of sorts, possibly off-site, where we can pick up our flagging interest and get refocussed. We are in dire need of something like that. Obviously this isn't the forum. It's just not working.

Nicholas: It's not uncommon to have ebbs and flows with new initiatives.

Jack: Yeah, we need to just hang in there.

Sue: The mentor meetings don't seem to be doing anything. We have a meeting for the sake of having a meeting even if there are only four or five people. We're not making any progress. We're not getting anywhere. I don't have any mentees. As far as I'm aware my ALE group has not met at all. Met once after we came back and that's it. Why are we doing it?

Russell: I have a similar feeling. Something seems to be missing in the purpose statements. Even though we've got those three statements I've still got a question mark on the real purpose of having these meetings. What's missing for me is a deep understanding of the real need to have these meetings. The purpose statements are more of a scope of what we do rather than a mission of why we do it at all. And I think that if a meeting or any group doesn't have a deep understanding of that then there is no real drive to want to come back. So somehow, something is lacking and I don't know what it is.

Jack: I thought we had got vamped up when Barry gave his presentation at our meeting last month. You couldn't get a seat in this room. It was excellent and how he said he is now learning to delegate and trust his people more. I thought that was the turning point. "It's been picked up off its backside," I thought. "It's going places."

Julian: Once we got the three purpose statements I thought we were going to be fine. It was about two meetings after that, after having gone to all that trouble for four or five weeks, that all of a sudden, some of us didn't agree that the purposes were what was written up there. And then, within two or three meetings, we lost those purpose statements. That's where I feel the meetings went off the rails, at that point in time. I was pleased with the progress the mentor group was making. Although it may have seemed slight it did appear to be heading somewhere.

Tim: I've got a question for those of you who were in this from the beginning. I remember being told that the mentors in the original group were having a great deal of success. Enjoying the meetings and getting a lot out of them. Is it possible to state perhaps the difference, the change in focus, that has occurred over that period of time?

Russell: By the end we certainly had established a common sense of understanding, but that had been only after a long struggle.

Jason: One of the differences is the attendance. The average was 8 out of 10. Many cases there was full attendance. Now it's 40 to 50%.

George: This affects the agenda when the person who's put the item on the agenda is not there. The rest of us ask ourselves, "What is it about?" So then that item is carried over to the next meeting, and then the next, and the next.

Sue: One of the other differences too is that in the first round we were assigned certain mentees. We were held responsible. Now we don't all have those relationships. So we don't have that focus any more. I don't have any mentees. Now that we've got the ALE support groups we're off the hook a bit.

Gerry: Last round was a happening experience. It isn't now. To be honest when we had our triads and we had our mentor group, I really thought we were going places, you know. I was really enthusiastic and I felt encouraged.

We seemed to be making headway. We were making lists and defining things and narrowing scope and talking about problems that we had and ideas to help people with problems. And there was the odd pat on the back. There'd be comments after a meeting: "Oh yeah, I thought what you were saying was really good. It's interesting and I might do some reading on it."

There was a kind of camaraderie. There had been some momentum. Then Round Two came along and I don't think we ever picked up where we left off in Round One. We never seemed to even have got onto the same tracks.

(Long silence.)

Russell: If we stop having these meetings what would happen? Why don't we stop having the meetings altogether?

(Mentors speak in unison, asking one another, "Yes, what would happen?", "What would happen if we had no meetings?", "What do you think would happen?" After a minute there is another long silence before people begin to speak.)

Jack: If the meetings do not continue the whole Project will finish. It will go flat. I also feel the meetings are a discipline. It's a discipline that's helped me with other meetings.

Russell: I understand that Jack, but if these meetings were to stop, so what? Really the purpose of the whole program is action learning. And there are more people involved than just us. What value are these meetings adding to the overall project?

> **Brian:** I think we need to have these meetings to monitor and steer that process. It is a forum, I think, for sharing what's going on and our ideas. If we don't do it here then I think, chances are, the whole Project will waffle on and die.
>
> **Julian:** I'd bet you that the ALE support meetings would quickly follow suit. If we shut this up and didn't have a meeting for a month and half one of the next things down the line would be the ALE support groups. Somehow this meeting is loosely responsible for those ALE support groups getting together. If you take that away it wouldn't surprise me if they went as well.
>
> **Jack:** Look, some meetings might be small, but we still keep adding stuff. We need to share it with the rest of the group. There's Gerry's contribution, Barry's, Audrey's talk on the Jack Mezirow lecture out at the uni. All this has happened in the last four weeks. I'm looking forward to listening to Jo's report on the conference she's on. I think there is stuff flowing into the system. I'm getting requests now. I've got this bloke who says to me, "Anything you get on reflection for Christ's sake will you let me have it? I've got time to read anything on this subject that you can give me." So there's been some success stories. Craig is thinking of coming back into the fold. It will die if this continued effort doesn't keep going.

Narrator: For once we had all agreed on something. None of us wanted to see the meetings go. Changes had to be made and we all identified different problems.

(Flashback.)

> **Simon:** I remember when I left three weeks ago to go on holidays we were talking about someone starting up the ALE group I was in and having meetings. But nothing has happened. We do a lot of talking. A lot of times we do need to talk sure, but somewhere along the line, at some stage, a decision has to be made for something to be done.
>
> **George:** There doesn't seem to be anyone that's actually driving it, driving it forward, keeping it moving. We tend to be going forward and then coming back a step.

Russell: Maybe we should get back to core business.

Brian: To go back to our purpose statements, our main purpose should be to monitor and steer that whole development process and that's the ALEs and everything else that's going on. I see that as a role for the mentors, and to help each other become better mentors is our second effort.

Julian: We waste too much time at meetings. There are too many niceties. We would burn up 20, 25 minutes before addressing the real agenda items. We never have enough time to meaningfully discuss even one topic in what's left of the hour. Maybe we should look at changing the meeting agenda structure. On days where we want to specifically focus on one area we *can* the "blue hat" and we *can* the mentor reports. Instead, we spend, say, 45 minutes on the one issue. And one we could look at right away is why the ALE support groups are not all meeting.

Tim: The side tracking we do at meetings is just unbelievable. Trying to take minutes is just farcical. The week I took the minutes I had five pages and everyone was on a different topic for the same agenda item.

Narrator: That discussion led us to making some changes. We agreed that changing the way we ran our meetings would help us get more out of them. Fewer items were put on the agenda. We decided that, if at all possible, the main item for a meeting had to come to a conclusion at that meeting. Someone would be responsible for preparing and facilitating the discussion of that item. To keep everyone in the loop we made sure to pass on interesting material to people in the ALE groups that were operating and to mentors who did not come to meetings.

Julian's suggestion of discussing why some ALE support groups were not functioning was not mentioned again. Neither was Simon's call for less talk and more action.

A couple of weeks later we had visitors come to our meeting. They were two mentees. A few months earlier we had begun sending the agenda and the minutes of our meetings to all participants in the Project with an open invitation to attend. That was the first time the offer had been taken up. By then Brian had begun chairing the meetings because George had stopped coming to meetings. His workload had increased after the new general manager had arrived. At that meeting Brian was wanting input for a discussion he was going to be having with the consultants.

(Flashback. Audrey and Ben enter together from the wings.)

Audrey: Are we allowed in here?

Brian: Of course. You're more than welcome.

(Audrey and Ben sit at the table.)

Brian: The only item I had on the agenda was any issue you would like to have discussed with Jim and John next week.

Ben: Well, I rang you with the problem Brian. It's the lack of attendance at the ALE support group I was in. It got down to two people. It sort of indicates the importance people are placing on it and it probably indicates the progress people are making overall. I don't think people are seeing the benefit they'd be getting for themselves and for the company if they did participate. I would like to see if we can give it a kick along for the last month or so and have a good Celebration Day.

Sue: It's possible that there are some people who are doing their ALEs but are not going to the meetings. I'm one of those people who doesn't particularly like going to those meetings, but my ALE is coming along quite fine. And my enthusiasm for the Project is still high.

Ben: Sure, I understand that.

Jason: In the case of the ALE group I was in we met the once and we decided not to have another meeting unless someone felt the need to have another meeting. I think it might have met one more time after that.

Julian: I agree that on the whole, ALE meeting attendance is a good indicator of the enthusiasm.

Jo: Ben's been talking about the ALE support groups. I'd also be interested in knowing how the mentor–mentee arrangements have been going.

Audrey: Well that's what I want to be talking about because from where I'm sitting, I don't see it working. Maybe I'm wrong. I was just wondering what the mentors were actually doing.

Ben: Was there some sort of decision taken by the group to withdraw the level of support or to make it less? Maybe so that we mentees would come forward more? I noticed with my mentor that one day the mentoring just sort of stopped and never started again. He's not here at this meeting, by the way.

Brian: No there was no decision made like that at all.

Audrey: I was just wondering if it was working for some people because it doesn't seem to be for the people I've spoken to. I've asked, "How's your ALE going?" and they've said, "It's not." And I've wondered if they had a mentor they could talk to about it, but that hasn't happened. Shouldn't the mentors be checking up on them?

Tim: Some mentors probably don't know who their mentees are.

Audrey: Why is this?

Julian: Because the mentee was going to approach the mentor and it just never happened.

Audrey: Well I approached my mentor and we spoke a couple of times. But I haven't had any real mentoring. He's not at this meeting either. And I just wonder, as a mentor group, you have all these meetings and the extra training to enable you to become better mentors, but what are you doing? How successful do you feel if you're not mentoring anybody? I mean how do the mentors feel when what you've learned is not being used?

Sue: I don't have any mentees, but I find that the skills I'm picking up through this sort of stuff I use everyday. In answer to your other question, Audrey, as a group I don't think we've been successful at all this semester.

Audrey: I'm getting that message because I've been reading what the group is putting through OfficeMail. So if that is the case what should be happening?

Sue: We haven't found an answer.

Barry: You can't have a mentor–mentee relationship where it becomes the crutch you're going to lean on. This is life. If I had a mentee like that I'd piss him off. I don't think that's the idea of this Project. This project is about reflection, about changing the way we think. It's hard work. Think about it: basically people are bloody lazy. Audrey talks as if the mentoring would have been the panacea to cure all ills. I don't think it is.

Audrey: I don't need a crutch. No one has taken me under their wing and I am still doing my ALE. I have nearly finished it. I go to all the ALE support group meetings. I don't *need* the mentor, but every now and then it would be handy to have the mentor. Just to throw a few ideas at somebody or if I've got a problem I can say, "Hey I've got this problem." The mentor I chose was someone I thought I could really work with. We've known each other for ages. I told him I wanted to get into a bit of theorising. He thought it was a good idea and he said he would organise the time. But it never happened. I think maybe he is just too busy.

The point I'm making is that a lot of people aren't doing their ALEs. Why have they stopped their ALEs? Why are they dropping out? Why haven't the mentors done anything? Could the mentors help them?

Barry: I don't think you can lob mentoring into an ALE. You tend to mentor people in your own workplace by default just by having discussions and talking things through. To me that's a type of mentoring. You're putting your point of view across, you're using your knowledge and experience to say this is another way of looking at it or of doing it; sizing something up; let's try it this way. It's a low key approach. It's not setting out to sit someone down and saying, "I'm going to mentor you to death."

Brian: I hear Audrey saying, "Could mentors have been more proactive?" In the first round we were allocated one to one. The second time round we just basically said, "We're here if you need us." Have we gone too far that way? Those who had fallen by the wayside—should we have gone and picked them up?

Sue: The first time the responsibility was on the mentor, but this time it is on the mentee. We need to find somewhere in between.

Audrey: I think you're right. I think it was too formal the first time and now it's gone too much the other way.

Brian: So how do we monitor those people to see if they're happy to motor along on their own or whether they do need some help?

(Spotlight is on the narrator and the mentor group is in shadow. Audrey and Ben leave the stage.)

Narrator: After that meeting most of our mentor meetings became training sessions on the different skills or on mentoring. They were mainly run by Brian and Jo. The two ALE support groups run by two of the new mentors continued to meet every fortnight.

Just before Celebration Day, we had our last mentor meeting for Round Two. That last meeting was significant for a number of reasons. It was to be the very last meeting of the mentor group as we knew it. It was the meeting where the managers signalled that their participation would be changing. Until then, all managers, with one exception, had been mentors in the Project. It was also the meeting at which we agreed that the ALEs and the support system had to be in some way aligned with normal work and actual roles and accountabilities. And lastly, that meeting showed, that even after twelve months, we still were not comfortable with an organised mentoring structure.

Brian chaired the meeting. *(While narrator is speaking, Brian is handing out a document to the ten mentors at the meeting.)* Over the previous couple of weeks he and Jo had been collecting feedback from us on the changes we wanted to see to the support system for the following year. For the meeting, Brian had summarised those changes into about twenty items and he and Jo were wanting our reactions to them.

(Flashback. Ten mentors are illuminated around the table.)

Jo *(looking down at the sheet)***:** What's your reaction to the suggestion here of starting the mentor group from scratch? Having new membership, new responsibilities, and a new definition?

(Murmurs of general agreement.)

Nicholas: A great idea.

Jo: Tell me why.

Nicholas: Having tried a few approaches I think it's useful to do a real solid stocktake. Let's not just do more of the same again, but let's start afresh—at a higher level. In other words, we've learned a whole lot of stuff. Let's use it! Confirm who wants to come on board. Tell them a whole of lot of things before they come on board—like what's involved in mentoring, the time it will take. A fresh start brings with it the opportunity to do some things quite differently—you might bring some new people in, I don't know.

Sue: Over the year we've had a taste of what mentoring is about and now is the time for people to decide if they want to continue investing the time to be a mentor or not.

Brian: Now if we take up the idea that mentoring itself can be an ALE then mentors can have their own support group. Instead of thinking that the mentor group has the responsibilities that we defined midyear, it can be like any other support group. It goes back to square one with its purpose being simply to improve our skills as mentors. So it's not a mentor group as such, but just another ALE support group based around mentoring skills.

Jo: Russell what's your reaction to that?

(Russell looks at the sheet.)

Russell: I agree with the item here that says, "Have no subgroup called a mentor group." I think we should offer the training in the skills associated with mentorship to everyone who's involved in the Project and then let it be a case of self-selection. Those people who naturally have an affinity for helping others will do so and they'll use the skills they've learned. Some sort of group will form for sure, but it won't be a formal, labelled structure as such.

Jo: Okay, let's consider this scenario. Say no manager decides to be a mentor within the Project. Would that be acceptable?

Russell: Yes, it would be, providing we had sponsorship and endorsement from management for the Project. We would need that endorsement. But I'd be surprised if the managers weren't mentoring at least somebody in the Project.

Nicholas: You see, managers practise aspects of mentoring as part of normal management. That is where the modern management approach has taken us. So whether they put their hand up and say, "I want to visibly practise and participate in a rapid learning curve to become a better mentor" or they just continue to exercise different levels of mentoring in their normal work is really the difference that you are talking about.

Jo: I think there might be other issues. In a scenario where no manager chooses to be a mentor, participants may come to all sorts of conclusions—and I'm not saying that they need all be right. But they might say, "Look at that! The people who need good mentoring skills more than anyone else here are the managers and they're not even mentors in the Project. So how interested must they be in wanting to improve their skills?"

Nicholas: A good point.

Russell: That's why I said I'd be surprised if they weren't going to be involved because that's their job.

Jo: But what I think Nicholas is saying is because it *is* their job, they don't need to be mentors in this Project.

Nicholas: What I'm saying is they may not choose to put their hand up. They may have other priorities.

Brian: If we have mentors form an ALE support group of their own then people wouldn't know whether managers or anyone else were mentors.

Russell: Those people who choose to actively mentor will end up talking to one another. Tim and I might just have a two-way discussion in his office and Julian here might join in and all of a sudden we might have a group of five or six people who are regularly getting together because they're getting something out of it. We wouldn't have a mentor structure as such, but we would have people who would meet together as a group to discuss and help each other with mentoring. There's a difference.

To me, having a mentor structure is like putting a sign on. I personally don't feel any need to be walking round the organisation with a sign on my forehead that says, "Mentor."

(Narrator exits the stage as light goes down on the mentor group. Jo leaves the table carries and goes to the chair vacated by the narrator. She sits down.)

Jo: I remember those six months as a time of unfulfilled promise. Many of the suggestions that had been made by the participants from the first Phase had been implemented, but they did not have the anticipated result. So, in terms of numbers, what happened?

(Jo looks up the statistics in her folder.)

At most, six of the sixteen mentors actively mentored in dyads or in ALE support groups for any length of time.

Mentors met every week. Only one meeting was cancelled due to poor attendance.

None of the three mentor skill groups became established.

Two of the five ALE support groups ran fortnightly meetings. The other three failed to become established although each met two or three times.

Thirty per cent of the participants attended at least six meetings of ALE support groups. Ten per cent attended none.

Only one mentee believed that their dyad had been a success.

Those figures were not good, but they did provide some encouragement to Russell, Brian, and the research team. They indicated that the support group structure had generated more formal interaction amongst the participants within the context of the Project than had occurred in the first round.

Participants had also reported more informal interaction to do with the ALEs. This, together with the data that Brian and I had collected towards the end, inspired new ideas for the support system in Phase Three.

The next workshops were scheduled two months after Phase Two ended and over the recess, most of us, research team and participants alike, felt the Project was going to experience some sort of sea change. The new General Manager had kept the Project at arm's length. Rumbles of restructuring were becoming louder and some active participants in the Project had already been seconded to other positions within MIM away from the plant. Many of us felt a sense of foreboding. I wasn't really certain if there was going to be a Round Three.

END OF ACT II

Act III: Diversity and direction

Characters:

Jo, the on-site researcher carrying a ring-binder folder

5 group mentors: Brian, Arthur, Sue, Tim, George

40 other participants: 2 females and 38 males; most carry documents, mail, etc.

Speaking parts:

Patrick (early thirties), support group member
Phillip (mid-forties), participant, carries a folder
Fred (midthirties), support group member
Harry (mid-forties), support group member, carries a rolled up sheet of paper
Noel (late thirties), support group member
David, Chris (both early forties), co-mentors
Craig, Mark (both late forties), co-mentors
Joseph (late twenties), mentee, wears a lab coat
Leanne (mid-twenties), mentee
Steven, Bill (early fifties), co-mentors

There is no narrator in this Act.

Scene:

The table from Act II is removed. Six chairs, facing the audience, form a shallow semicircle toward the centre front of the stage. Single chairs, clusters of 2 or 3 chairs, and some lab stools are positioned randomly across the stage. All face the audience.

There are no flashbacks in this Act. The "time zone" for the entire act is immediately at the end of Phase 3.

The characters are waiting in the wings on both sides of the stage. The mentees with speaking parts go on to the stage a moment or so before it's their turn to speak. The rest go on to the stage singly or in small groups as the Act progresses and they sit or stand singly or in small groups. By the end of the Act, all the characters are on the stage.

The Act begins with the stage in shadow. As people fill the stage, the shadows progressively disappear until all the stage is lit. At any given time the spotlight is on the speaker.

The Act opens with the five group mentors and the researcher walking on to the stage and sitting down in the chairs in the semicircle. Brian is at one end of the semicircle. No order is suggested for the rest. They hold folders or their red think books in their hands. The group of six is lit and the spotlight is directed toward the speaker.

Act III: Diversity and direction

(Spotlight is on Jo.)

Jo: As a lead up to the third round of workshops—and yes, they did happen—Brian *(Looks at Brian.)* and I did a lot of work we hadn't done before. A critical incident for me was a conference I went to late last year. It highlighted the importance of leadership in professional development initiatives like ours. That conference legitimised my own growing sense that leadership was critical to the development of the peer learning support system here at CRL and that, in some respects, leadership was missing. In the third round the leadership issue became even more important. Talk of restructuring had made the work force unsettled. The managers, while still involved in the Project, had withdrawn from any kind of formal mentoring role and the mentor group had dissolved. The setting up of a steering committee in this phase partly addressed leadership issues. It consisted of two managers, Brian, and me representing the research team. Its purpose was to steer and monitor the progress of the Project in the company. It ended up meeting only three times and didn't really do much.

Brian: Jo and I had a number of discussions about leadership. I certainly became more proactive in this last phase. I realised that if we were going to have success in the Project, it would take more energy and drive on my part. It wasn't going to improve the way we were going and nobody else was going to pick it up, so I had to make a choice. Either I continued to just do my part and watch it grind to a halt because others weren't doing theirs—at least, what I thought was theirs—or I did that little bit extra. I decided to go for the second option. I had the time and the ability to pick it up, get more involved, and do more, and I hoped we would get a better result.

It required a mind shift on my part to go that way. I guess my tendency has always been to do my role, but not go much beyond that because I expect others to play their part. I play my part and I expect everybody else to do theirs. If they don't, well, stiff. But now I am more inclined to pick theirs up and take that as well. Give it a shove, do it myself, or go and prod them and say, "Why aren't you doing that?"

In the two months leading up to the workshops, Jo and I prepared work sheets for participants to fill out about their intended ALEs. The aim here was to have them start thinking in advance about their topic and the skills they wanted to concentrate on. On those sheets we also asked about the sort of support structures they had in mind and whether they would like to be support persons or mentors for others. This was so we could have some idea in advance about the kinds of support structures to organise. When we got the sheets back we saw that almost everyone with one or two exceptions wrote they wanted some sort of formal support. The forms of support varied. Some of the new members wanted to be mentees; others requested co-mentoring arrangements which we ended up calling learning partnerships; most wanted support groups.

Jo: Like the other two phases, the third phase began with three-day workshops for all the participants—old and new. The workshops aimed at further developing the skills, especially the thinking and reflection skills, introduced at the previous training sessions. A lot of time was allocated to planning ALE projects, certainly much more than in the previous workshops.

This time around there was no mentoring workshop. We decided to do this even though some participants were going to be formal mentors for their very first time. Not only that, there was going to be a new form of support, which for want of a better term, we all decided to call group mentoring. Despite this, we decided against a mentoring workshop for two reasons.

The ongoing resistance to the so-called "preferential" treatment given to mentors had continued and a special workshop would have again fuelled such resistance. Secondly, Brian, the managers, and the research team considered that regular, ongoing training would provide good and maybe even more effective learning opportunities. We agreed that Brian would support the mentors in the dyad arrangements and I would support the group mentors.

Brian: Straight after the workshop was a very busy time for me. Participants had to get into me their detailed final ALE plans together with their preferred support structures and the names of their preferred support people. There were mentor–mentee relationships and learning partnerships to organise. People had written down their preferences and it was my job to broker these pairings to make sure that both parties were happy with the arrangement. All up there would have been seven of these matches. Then there were the temporary mentoring relationships. This is where, for however long it took, I met with those who were having difficulty organising their ALE plans. Once everything was bedded down, I emailed everybody a list of all the participants with the skill areas they were interested in developing. The idea there was for people to know who they might contact as a resource. I know that a number of people used that list to contact like-minded learners.

The other way they did this of course was through the ALE support groups, which also had to be set up. All told we needed five ALE support groups and there were also enough requests for a think-tank group that just concentrated on problem solving skills. Some participants had volunteered to be group mentors, but I had to find two more to fill the gaps.

(Spotlight turns to the group mentors as they speak.)

Arthur: Brian invited me to be a group mentor and I decided to take it on because I wanted to assist the process to function. I thought the groups would be a good way to network with others in the Project. I also thought it would help me get a better understanding of my own ALE.

I wasn't really worried about leading the group. What I was worried about was not having a process for making the support group meetings function.

Sue: I volunteered to be a group mentor because I thought it would be a challenge and an opportunity to grow myself. I took on the think-tank as well. I wanted to develop skills in group facilitation, learn more about problem solving, and I really wanted to help others with their ALEs.

Because I feel comfortable about calling and chairing meetings, I didn't see that sort of thing as a problem. I was more concerned about being able to keep up the enthusiasm and challenge in the group and being able to help others to help themselves in a group forum.

Tim: Brian asked me if I would be a group mentor. My first thoughts when I decided to take this on were, "I'd better, because who the bloody hell else are they going to get? Who honestly is going to take it on?" Then I thought, "Alright, I made some progress last year as a group mentor and this is another opportunity to improve my own mentoring skills."

I was hoping to see people in my group begin a new learning process in a new learning environment with their peer learners. I was hoping, once they saw the benefits, they would realise the need to learn.

Like Arthur and Sue I was comfortable with the idea of chairing meetings, organising, getting information. It was the "real stuff" that I knew I had to get better at, like listening, questioning, guiding, advising.

Brian: For me it was an opportunity to improve my mentoring skills in a group setting. I suppose what I was wanting to get out of it was the satisfaction that my efforts could help others learn.

The one thing that concerned me was having enough content each week to satisfy the multiple needs of group members.

George: I offered to be a group mentor because I believe that I mentor better to groups than one-on-one. And I know if I improve my mentoring skills my everyday work skills will also improve. Plus I wanted to support the Project. I wanted to contribute to moving the Project further across the workplace.

I didn't have any real concerns about being a group mentor other than to say that I realised I needed to build up my PPK in that area.

Jo: The group mentors wanted assistance in learning to run their support groups. Formal assistance had been missing last year. To do that we decided to have a mentor meeting every fortnight. At these sessions we would talk about ideas that could be useful in running their own meetings. We'd talk about how the meetings went and ways of improving them. In the alternate weeks they would have their own support group meetings with the people who chose that group. Anyone could go to any meeting at any time and Brian or I were regular guest visitors.

We also decided to have a mentor manual. The request for a mentor manual had come up at the end of last year. There was a bit of a catch with producing a manual. We realised that, for it to be useful, it needed to be prepared ahead of time. The problem with that was none of us really knew what was going to be needed. The other problem was it would not include the PPK produced by the group. In the end, we decided the manual was going to be built on fortnight by fortnight with contributions from all the group mentors and me. It would include public knowledge from books and it would also include PPK from the mentors.

(Jo opens the folder and looks through it.)

I started it off with a transcript of an interview I had with Tim at the end of last year on his experience in running a support group. Tim had given me his permission to use it and discuss his learnings at our first meeting. From then on, all sorts of things went into the manual: summary sheets produced by mentors who gave presentations; detailed explanations of skills. We focussed on reflection a lot in those meetings. So there is a series of reflections here written by different mentors and me that use different techniques. As we all gained experience we changed what went into the manual and what we did at our mentor meetings.

The interviews I was having with the mentees showed that, on the whole, the support groups were working better than last year. They didn't suit everyone, but those who did attend regularly found them useful for many different reasons.

(Patrick, Phillip, and Fred enter at the same time and go to different parts of the stage. The spotlight falls on the speaker.)

Patrick: Yeah, the meetings that George ran were quite useful. The ALE support group was really good in giving me ideas about facilitative questioning, seeing how other people do it, and where they apply it. I tried a little experiment at one of our meetings once. I asked everyone if they could come up with an analogy to help describe what facilitative questioning was. I find analogies quite useful. When I'm learning something I find I catch on and learn a lot quicker through analogies and stuff. Because I am involved in a lot of highly technical work I also find them a useful way of explaining things to laymen.

Anyway we had a lot of fun and came up with some good ones. Someone copied them down and then gave a copy to everyone. *(Finds the copy in his folder and reads from it.)* We said things like, "Facilitative questioning is like throwing stones over a wall—most just go thud but sometimes they go plop"; Facilitative questioning is "like opening a window in a wall." Someone else said, "It was like skiing down hill with only one pole." *(Closes folder.)* That was a pretty good meeting actually. There were quite a few people at that one—George must have advertised it.

Phillip: This time round I thought I'd really make an effort. I had said I'd go to an ALE support group. In the end I only went a couple of times. Other things kept getting in the way. Personally I think if I wanted help or to talk something over with someone I'd do it on an "as needs" basis. I wouldn't wait for a fortnightly meeting to talk about it to a bunch of people.

Fred: I kept going to the support group meetings. I don't know whether I noticed any great change in anything. At one stage there I thought there wasn't much point in going any more, but I kept going and thought, "Well if anything comes out of it, it's a bonus." If you pull out of it, around the corner there might be some significant change. So, yeah, I kept going, hoping there was going to be a big, blinding light instead of just the usual, little pin light. If nothing else they kept my motivation up. Put it this way, if there had been no support group, after the workshop, I wouldn't have given the professional development project another thought.

(Harry enters the stage with a roll of paper.)

Harry: How the ALE support group worked for me was I asked Tim—he was the group mentor—if we could have a bit of a brainstorm about my ALE. His group was the time management group and I was wanting to improve my time management. I was definitely disorganised and a lot of people I worked with agreed with me. *(Laugh.)*

There were about eight or ten people at that meeting and we ended up using the "Define the Problem" technique. Actually the process amazed me. It drew out a hit list of items, of things that were possibly causing me to be badly organised and badly planned. I've got the sheet here that they all got written on. *(Unrolls a large sheet of paper, shows it to the audience as he reads from it.)* "Inability to delegate some work." On a scale from one to ten, I was a four and I should have been at least a six. "Not keeping a diary." My way of doing things has always been writing notes to myself on pieces of paper, never a diary. There were a lot of things—important and unimportant stuff. "Harry's too kind."*(Rolling the paper back up.)* I felt great when I came out of that meeting. And, you know, in that first week I had my office tidied up. That's a fact. And I even had new files done, would you believe! I've maintained the file system but I haven't yet got myself a diary. I could have been miles ahead of this had it not been for what was happening in the company. It's just stagnated a lot of things.

My undertaking had been to get to as many meetings as I could because I thought the feedback was important, and also the sharing of common thoughts and ideas. But in the last couple of months I stopped going. The way the company's been lately, everyone has been walking on bloody tightropes.

(Noel enters.)

Noel: I found the group meetings to be more supportive than just one-on-ones with a mentor. You also get a range of opinions. The other thing is the shame factor when you have done nothing and everyone else has done something. It's the herd mentality really. You see everybody else in the group is dead keen and leaping ahead in leaps and bounds, you sit back and think, "Shit, there are five other people doing this and I haven't done anything and they are out in front." It makes you want to work more on your ALE.

(Spotlight returns to Brian sitting in the semi-circle.)

Brian: While Jo was working with the support groups I was mainly concentrating on the dyads. This time around we tried using mentoring agreements and learning partnership agreements with the dyads. If nothing else we thought that completing the agreements together would make sure that they actually met and discussed things like their expectations, the logistics of developing the relationship, how often they would meet, what they would do if it wasn't working out. Last time many of the dyads had never even met. This time round I arranged the first meetings of the dyads. The engineer type people liked the agreements because it gave them structure. Others felt they were too constricting. After that first meeting, I kept in touch with the mentors, acting as a sounding board and helping in any way I could. There were mixed results, but overall, better than last year.

(David and Chris enter together. They stand behind the group mentors. Spotlight is on both.)

David: Well, last year I was in a triad and that didn't work and then I was in a pair and that didn't work either. This time I'm in a learning partnership with Chris where we mentored each other.

Chris: We chose each other because we were working on the same project. We met formally once a fortnight. And I guess the chemistry was right. I don't know of any other way of putting it. We get on well together and we complement each other. In some areas where I lack experience he has got a flair, and vice versa.

David: There's no question that we support each other. It's a mutual admiration society. *(Both laugh.)* We pat each other on the back.

Chris: We challenge each other as well, but not to the same extent, do we? He challenges me by giving me tasks to do that I would not have felt comfortable doing. And I challenge him by questioning his world views.

We already had a good working relationship anyway. But I think this has developed it much further. It's improved the quality of our talk, I think, both at a professional level and at a personal level.

(Craig and Mark come onto the stage together and sit in a couple of chairs facing the audience.)

Craig: Mark here and me, we paired up as learning partners because we were both wanting to improve our report-writing skills. Our experience has been different from David and Chris.

Mark: We had a couple of meetings but what we found was they were just degenerating into a chat session.

Craig: You see things changed. I was able to delegate a lot of my report writing to someone who I had just taken on board. So it has become less of a worry.

Mark: For me report writing was high on the agenda at the time I decided on my ALE because I had a report due. But then I didn't have another one due until this month actually. So the motivation sort of went out of it.

Craig: So what we decided to do was abandon our meetings and to reconvene at a later date—which we never did.

Mark: That's right. Now, even though I didn't have an ALE as such, I still kept going to my ALE support group meetings. I still got a lot out of them because the group was about facilitative questioning and I use that a lot in my work.

(Joseph enters and sits on a lab stool.)

Joseph: I joined the Project just this year so I don't really know what it was like before. As well as being a member of a support group I also had a mentor. I'm in charge of the Quality Assurance system in the laboratory and my ALE was to make some changes to the system. The skill I wanted to work on was facilitative questioning so that's why I joined George's group. Craig and Noel were my other main resources for the ALE. Craig had just taken charge of the lab and Noel, who's now in R & D, had been the boss of the lab before Craig. I used facilitative questioning with both but in sort of different ways.

With Craig, I was using facilitative questioning to find out exactly what he wanted out of the QA system. He didn't just want changes in terms of roles and responsibilities, but also attitude changes, which are not so easy to put down on paper. I needed to know what Craig wanted so I could distil that information into some words and policies and so on.

I found it a bit hard at first, probably because I was using facilitative questioning to find out what somebody else wanted and not what I wanted. The hardest thing was trying to remove any pre-planned ideas I had from my questioning. I think that is the key thing I learnt from the workshop. So it was a matter of biting my tongue or going back after just having heard myself say something and thinking of a new way of rephrasing the question that sort of took my bias out of it.

With Noel it was different. I had asked for Noel to be my technical mentor in the Project. Obviously he had done a lot of work with the QA system and he knows how the laboratory runs. So he's got all the technical knowledge. Because he had put in place a lot of the existing QA procedures I used facilitative questioning on him to find out the background behind the few sentences that existed on a piece of paper. I wanted to understand why he did what he did.

Because he has a lot of familiarity with how the lab works I was also able to put to him my ideas of how I wanted one or two things to run. I was able to bounce those off him and see what he reckoned in the overall frame of how the system operates. So that worked pretty well.

With Noel it was more enjoyable because our conversations would get my creative forces going. Whereas with Craig I was holding back a little so that he could state the way he wanted the laboratory to be run. So you can sort of see what I am getting at there.

Noel and I tried doing it on a formal basis like sitting down once a week every week and doing it, but it didn't really work. We ended up doing it informally. I'd just go up to his office one afternoon for 10 or 15 minutes and discuss whatever problem I had in front of me at the time that had been nagging me, thinking that it could be done in a better way.

I have to say though that after April my ALE sort of died. Pressures from other facets of work took over, basically. I had fully expected getting some interruptions from time to time, but unfortunately you can't predict when they are going to arrive and how big they are going to be.

Brian: My own mentoring relationship with Leanne worked quite well I thought. Ours actually started in Phase Two, but I never discussed it at the mentor meetings back then.

(Leanne enters and pulls up a chair near Brian and sits down. Brian and Leanne take turns telling their story. They mainly look at the audience and sometimes at each other. Spotlight is on both.)

Leanne: I chose Brian to be the mentor for my ALE. I said to him, "Hey Brian you're it". He was my mentor for my project in the second round so I think he half expected it. My ALE was using the Benner model to rate myself in the different skills for my job. To see where I was a novice, an advanced beginner, and all that. I didn't have a job description and I was new to this position. So the first thing I had to do was figure out what my job actually was. That was an exercise in itself. The idea was that doing this would help me identify which areas I needed to improve on.

To me Brian was a motivator. He was somebody who kept the ball rolling. He kept you honest and working on your project but without being forceful. It was like, well, "Where are you now?" And as soon as he'd say, "How about a meeting?" it was like, God, I started thinking about my ALE. What had I done? Where was I at? Because these were the questions that he'd ask me each time.

Brian: Leanne suggested we have our meetings on a fortnightly basis. I used to also make the point of just dropping in when I was walking past and having a little chat, for, say, ten or fifteen minutes, just on things various. But at some stage we'd talk about how the work was going.

Leanne: Actually the meetings with Brian were really good. Like I remember at one of them I showed him my list of all the things that were part of my job. And I had rated myself on them. And I had also got Tex, a colleague to give me a rating on each on them. And Pete looked at it and asked me how was I going to decide which ones I would work on first. So it was his idea to prioritise.

Brian *(looking at Leanne)*: What I tried to do was pick up my understanding of what Leanne's particular project was about.

Leanne: A lot of the time I didn't feel like I had achieved anything with my ALE. I thought that I hadn't progressed as far as I should have, or I should have done more, I should have done this and that. To me I hadn't succeeded, and yet when I'd go to those meetings with Brian and that, it was like ... *(Pause.)* Well, he'd say, "What have you done?", "Have you done this?", "How are you handling that now?", "How are you doing with such and such?" His questions made me realise that yes, I had changed the way I was doing something. But I didn't used to see it until it was put right in front of me basically.

Brian: I also tried to develop my understandings of the other aspects of the job and the relationships she had with other people that were impacting on her work place.

Leanne: When we met for the ALE it was basically not just the ALE that we talked about. It was just things in general. I started to realise that he was available for that as well and so I decided to make more use of him. I hadn't done that last time. Maybe I became a little bit more open with Brian. Before I had been a little bit more, let's say I had been a bit more reserved. It was probably a relationship-building thing that worked out. You learn to respect and trust somebody.

Brian: I tried not to throw solutions at Leanne. Sometimes though that's what was needed—I'd make them more like suggestions. Or I would ask questions that would make her come up with her own solutions. And she would.

Leanne: I think he had the knack of getting things out of you. I don't know; you sit there, and you go blurt, blurt, blurt and you think, "Oh my God why am I telling him this?" But he doesn't actually give you the answer, he prompts you.

Brian: One time I remember she had got so frustrated with the job she just walked out. People had been coming in, demanding things, imposing their deadlines on her. And that had all built up. So it was destroying her flow of work. So we just talked about what she could do to overcome that. We came up with a couple of strategies and we did a couple of role-plays to see how she might handle these situations better.

Leanne *(looking at Brian)*: That sort of thing really prompts you to ... *(Pause.)* Well, it prompted me to look further and to try different things. Like to be pro-active.

Jo: About three months into the third round the uncertainty about the future had started getting many people down. As far as the Project was concerned more participants had stopped working on their ALEs altogether.

(Steven and Bill enter the stage together. Spotlight is on both.)

Steven: I put my ALE off until I knew what was happening around here. I'm still reading about it but I'm in no position to implement anything here at the plant until I know what's happening.

Bill: We decided to bring our learning partnership to a halt. I just had the feeling his energy wasn't there. I think he was really feeling the pressure. We still don't know whether we are going to be here next month or not.

Sue: By this stage numbers at the support group meetings were dropping. In my case the average attendance was about three. It was better for the think-tank. I, for one, was beginning to feel that, if people were not doing ALEs, then there wasn't much point having ALE support groups.

Tim: The thing was that some of us had noticed with our groups that, even though some members were no longer doing their ALEs as such, we were still having really good meetings. In mine for example, we'd talk about the skills and how we were using them in our work. We realised that the support meetings could focus more on the skills rather than reporting on how we were progressing with our ALEs. I remember one meeting Nicholas came to. I wasn't expecting him, but, as it turned out, he was really good value. As a manager he had been to lots of time management courses and he sat down with the group and had a really good discussion. Anyway, when the numbers issue came up at the mentor meeting, we decided that, if necessary, we'd let go of the ALEs and make our support group meetings more skill development sessions and a time where we shared our experiences in using those skills.

Brian: Even though the company was going through a major restructuring, I felt that there was far more activity going on in this round than last year. The extra effort was paying off. But in the last month of the third phase it became my duty to tell the group that the company was pulling out of the Project. So we didn't have a Celebration Day this time. I told the group mentors the news at what was to our last meeting. They were disappointed but they knew the writing was on the wall. Retrenchments had started and by then I also knew that, after the shake-out, there probably wasn't going to be a H R department at CRL.

George: We certainly were disappointed, but for some of us, knowing that our jobs were—and still are—on the line, the Project was not our Number One concern. Because that was our last meeting for us group mentors we reflected on how the support system had worked out this time around.

Personally, I thought that we got somewhere this time. My own support group worked well. I was amazed at the positive change I saw in some people. Either they had changed because of the Project or I simply saw them in a different light from what I had previously. I'm not really sure. I also thought the meetings we had as a mentor group were pretty good. They gave me the basis for the meetings with my group.

Sue: I agree with George. I think we came close in the third round. The key I think is for support groups to be flexible enough to cater for all types of people. I also agree that our group mentor meetings were good. It was interesting to discover how different people think and interpret the same information—like how we seem to interpret reflection differently. What I still needed though was more information on keeping the challenge up to the people in my group. I struggled there.

Arthur: I enjoyed the meetings with the other group mentors but my own group did not work very well. There were only two regular members and it suffered from lack of input.

Tim: This year was a significant improvement on last year. The sessions that we group mentors had together made a big difference. Some of the support group meetings were not a great success but others were really good. There were times when I thought, "Oh, stuff it! I'll give it the flick." But the successes outweighed the bad times. I remember coming out of the room feeling we had all learnt something. Seeing someone who hadn't actively participated starting to interact. Realising that I had concentrated on being a better listener for the whole hour. That was a really good feeling. I think anything that increases communication on this plant is a bloody good thing. If the support system did that, if it brought people together so that they had at least enough compassion to try and understand each other, then it couldn't have been anything better.

George: I agree with Tim. It was a powerful process. I also believe that, unless it's planned for and arranged, that kind of learning does not happen often enough normally to be of value. But we still had a long way to go. At least three years had been planned for the process. We were barely half way there.

(As Brian talks the rest of the stage slowly goes into shadow. Spotlight is on Brian.)

Brian: After our meeting that day I sent out an email to everyone telling them the Project was going to shut down. I ended the email by saying:

(Light progressively fades on Brian as he reads the email.)

> There will be no further training within the Project and no further formal support for ALE support groups, learning partnerships, or mentoring. I would encourage you to continue using the skills and knowledge that you have acquired in your daily professional practice. I thank you all for the efforts you have put into your learning and this Project, and trust that it has had some impact on your PPK of how to improve your professional practice.

(Curtain falls. Everyone remains on the stage reading, opening mail, or talking to one another except for Jo, the researcher, who exits the stage and goes and sits in the audience. The silhouettes are seen through the curtain. No sound is heard from the stage.)

END OF ACT III

Coda: Dissolution

Characters:

Everyone from Act III

Jo, the on-site researcher

Scene:

The curtain remains drawn. All the characters are seen as silhouettes through the curtain. Some are standing, others are sitting—some alone, the rest in small huddles. There is a mood of listlessness about the posture and movement of many. The "time zone" of the characters is the four years between the project terminated and the present time.

The scene opens with Jo walking on to the stage in front of the curtain carrying a chair and a folder. She moves to centre stage, sits, and begins her monologue. She is speaking to the audience in "real time". As she speaks the stage silently and gradually empties.

Coda: Dissolution

(The spotlight is on her as she begins to speak to the audience.)

Jo: The decision that narrators of all kinds confront is how to end their narrative. At what point in time should the story end? And with what event? As with narrative itself there is no "natural" end point. End points are constructed.

For researchers the problem begins with determining the cut-off point for data collection. This can be a dilemma for researchers of social interventions because the impact of interventions need not conveniently end with the end of the study. Ethnographers have the additional requirement of explaining how they left the field in which they had been visitors. So for them, the end of the narrative needs to include reference to their own departure.

So how do I make this story end in a way that satisfies both you and me? Do I end it with the last meeting of the group mentors? Or my last interview? Do I end it with telling you that on behalf of the research team I wrote personalised thank-you notes to this group of people who had been so generous, giving, and forgiving? Or do I end it dramatically with the General Manager's notice that no more official work time was to be devoted to the project?

These points sound appropriate end points, but none is satisfactory because for some of us, the mentoring program did not end with its official closure date. Its end point as an organised structure seemed to come some months later. And because the purpose of this story was to show how this learning group evolved, it is fitting to conclude with what I heard happened in the four months after its formal demise.

After leaving the site my connection with the participant group was not entirely broken. The participant email list, which included my address, continued to exist for some time. Information from this source gave me an indication of what was happening at the plant generally and also to the mentoring program.

The upheaval associated with the downsizing of the company continued unabated for the rest of that year. One short email from Sam, a participant, hinted at the confusion and uncertainty. *(Jo opens folder and finds the email.)* He wrote:

> Just a quick note to say hi. I have missed our "little chats." Things are not all that good. Last week I was made redundant. This week I've been reinstated. Who knows what will happen next week? The restructuring looks like it will continue forever.

Given this climate I was surprised and excited to read, two months after the official termination of the program, an email from a young chemist who had joined the program in the third phase. *(Jo opens folder and finds the appropriate email.)* The email had been sent to all the participants and it said:

> Following a few recent discussions, it has been decided that CRL staff will try to resurrect the professional development group. The group will probably meet one lunchtime per fortnight to discuss aspects of professional thinking learnt at the various seminars. I have (been?) volunteered to chair the first meeting to be held on Tuesday 13 August at 12:00 p.m. in Conference Room 1. The topic for discussion will be the use of lateral thinking techniques to ascertain the most effective way to continue professional development at CRL. All are welcome to attend.

Two weeks later, another meeting was advertised. This time it was by a participant who had joined the program in Phase Two and who had been a mentor. This meeting was to further focus group direction through a review of the original fourteen skills learnt through the training workshops. The aim of the review was to select three skills on which the group would begin its work.

After this flurry of activity the email remained silent for over a month. A mentor who had joined the program at its inception broke the silence with these words:

> Jo we would very much like you to place a bomb under us, well maybe not a bomb, but .... Please ring for further information.

That phone call led to my meeting with a group of six participants. They had negotiated an arrangement with the General Manager that allowed participants to spend equal portions of personal time and paid time on the professional development project. For the meeting I had been asked to review some of the skills and to discuss ways in which the group could build its own momentum to continue.

After that discussion I saw only one more meeting advertised. I also heard through the grapevine that more strong supporters of the program were being made redundant. That was the last news I was to hear about the participants and the mentoring program.

Within six months of the Project's termination at the plant, the research team dissolved. One Chief Investigator took a redundancy package and another resigned. The third, who was from the University of Queensland, used the balance of the government funding to re-establish the research project in another organisation near his University some 1400 kilometres south of the refinery. The research officers, too, went their separate ways. I relocated to another campus of James Cook University, three hundred and fifty kilometres north of the refinery. An academic at that campus was prepared to be my supervisor although she had not been involved in the Project at all.

In the year 2000 I recontacted the company. The company that four years earlier had employed about 460 people had been downsized to a little over a third of this number. Of the fifty staff members who had had some involvement in the program, nine remained at the plant. No remnant of the peer learning support system set up in the mid-nineties remained.

And with that, I end the story.

THE END

Chapter Six

Readings of the narrative

"A story is a little knot or complex
of that species of connectedness
which we call *relevance*."

Bateson, 1979, p. 13

6.1 Introduction

This study aims to provide narrative and logico-scientific explanations (Bruner, 1991) for how and why the mentoring program evolved in the way it did. The last two chapters offered narrative explanations. Chapter Four set the contexts for interpreting Chapter Five, which, in the form of a stage play, told the story of the eighteen-month long experience. This chapter reinterprets the experience in another way through the lenses of adult learning theories and the literature on formal workplace mentoring.

Chapters Four and Five were a story about a peer learning support system in a particular workplace at a particular time with a particular group of people. In using the metaphor of narrative to make sense of the experience, these chapters gave a retrospective explanation of what happened that is unique to this case. They provided plausible interpretations for why things happened they way they did by bringing together in story form the many factors implicating time, place, action, and motive.

To illustrate the nature of narrative explanation I consider here some of the probable reasons for the formation of the steering committee. The steering committee comprised two managers, the H R Development Officer, and myself representing the research team. Its purpose was to monitor the peer learning support system and it reported directly to whole-of-management meetings.

To explain why the steering committee formed in the third phase, the narrative suggests a number of prior and attendant events and circumstances as possible contributing factors. The nucleus of the idea may have originated in Phase Two when the mentors drew up their mission statement listing the group's three purposes. While this event certainly identified and formalised the need for a monitoring and steering function, it fails to explain why the mentor group did not retain the role. Other factors become relevant here. Perhaps the mentor group did not follow through because it had been unable to agree on how to do it, or perhaps it did not see the task as part of its core business. The changing and more complex configuration of the learning support system and the increasing work-related demands on mentors' time might also have contributed to this function being relegated to a committee dedicated to the purpose.

It is very likely that the changing environment of the plant with its increasing emphasis on accountability was instrumental in the formation of the steering committee. Given that the mentoring program was the most visible and time-consuming component of the project, the steering committee was possibly an at arm's length mechanism that could monitor and evaluate it. Perhaps it was also no coincidence that the committee formed at the same time that the managers withdrew their hands-on involvement in the program.

With this reflection on just one element of the program, I am making the point that narrative has the capacity to draw together many factors, often interrelated, that are plausible reasons for explaining why something happened in the way it did. Such explanations are valuable to professional development consultants, managers, and researchers because of their embeddedness in experience, but their specificity can also limit their value.

The transition from specificity to different forms of generalisability occurs when the question one asks of the narrative concerns what it was a story *of* rather than what it was *about*. For me this question produces the confluence at which narrative and logic-scientific explanations merge.

Depending on the reader's perspective, the story of this peer learning support system can be primarily a story of organisational dynamics or even of group formation and specialisation. For the reasons I gave in Chapter One, I wanted this story to be a story *of learning* and all that entails. The narrative therefore was intended to convey the experience of transformation through personal and social acts of learning in the context of the peer support system. This perspective influenced what I considered relevant for inclusion in the narrative and it also influenced the choice of literature through which I now explore the questions that the experience raised for me in the field. This literature was reviewed in Chapter Three and concerns formal mentoring, individual learning, community learning, and organisational learning.

The first question I explore in this chapter is why the program encountered the many difficulties it did. The reasons I identify are clustered into three categories. The first comprises reasons that have the individual learner—mentor and mentee alike—as the focus. The second has to do with organisational factors that impacted on the program and the third focuses on the design aspects of the mentoring program itself.

The second important question I discuss here is why the program changed in the particular way it did. Despite the problems, we saw it not only survive but evolve. The term "evolve" connotes that the changes were positive. The word implies that the transformations shifted the program progressively from a lesser state to a better one. This has been a deliberate choice of word because in terms of active participation rates, positive feedback, and quantity and quality of interaction between participants, the peer learning support system did improve from one phase to the next. While this justifies the use of the term, it is also true that the third phase was by no means the final state of perfection. It was as much a response to the difficult organisational climate at the time as it was a response to the previous learnings experienced by the participants. There is no reason to think that the program would not have continued to evolve and mature in subsequent phases if it had not been terminated. In fact, changes had already been planned for the fourth phase.

The third question of importance to managers, researchers, and consultants concerns the value of the learning support system. In terms of time and money, was the investment worth it? While my purpose in this case study was not primarily evaluative, the issue of value is threaded through the entire narrative. Instead of making a determination on the value of the program, I consider the factors implicated in the process of assessment.

The final question that I address in this chapter is why my participation in the program changed. The question is relevant to the study not only from a professional interest in the nature of collaborative qualitative research, but also because my presence undoubtedly had an influence on the way the program evolved.

Before applying a "logico-scientific" perspective to these questions, I summarise in the next section the key structural ways in which the mentoring program evolved. As well as constituting visible evidence of change from one phase to the next, the different social arrangements are important to understanding how the program evolved. On the one hand, the social arrangements or structures were, at any given time, the result of prior learning, but on the other, they were shaping future learning experiences. The co-evolution of social arrangements, social capital, and learning are explored in a later section.

6.2 How did the peer learning support structure evolve?

Table 6.1 summarises the support arrangements introduced in each of the three phases. Arguably the most visible sign of change in the mentoring program was the increase in the kinds of peer support arrangements available in the third phase when compared with the first phase. Although Phase Three did exhibit the most diverse range of different peer support structures, Phase Two was the experimental ground where all had their origins as ideas if not as actual structures. For example, although the mentor skill group structure in the second phase had not been successful it was the forerunner of the successful participant skill group in the third phase.

Table 6.1. Peer support arrangements in each phase

Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Mentor–mentee triads	Mentor–mentee dyads	Mentor–mentee dyads
Mentor support group	ALE support groups (ASGs)	Co-mentoring dyads
	Mentor skill groups	Short term mentoring dyads
	Mentor support group	ALE support groups (ASGs)
		Skill support group
		ASG mentor support group
		Steering committee

The next table, Table 6.2, gives a numerical snapshot of staff participation in each phase. It shows that more participants were engaged in some form of peer support in the last phase than in the first. For each of the peer support structures I have included two sets of figures. The first is the number of triads, dyads, or groups that were set up at the beginning of each phase.

The second set of figures represents the number of active arrangements in each of those categories. By "active" I mean arrangements that functioned for the duration of the phase. The table shows that most dyadic arrangements did not succeed in providing the required support. In contrast, the support groups had more success.

Table 6.2. Numerical snapshot of participation in the peer learning support system

Total number of	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Participants	24	39	45
Mentors nominally involved in any arrangement	10	16	11
Planned mentor–mentee triads	8	n.a.*	n.a.
Active mentor–mentee triads	2	n.a.	n.a.
Planned long term mentor–mentee dyads	n.a.	16	4
Active long term mentor–mentee dyads	n.a.	2	2
Planned temporary mentor–mentee dyads	n.a.	n.a.	3
Active temporary mentor–mentee dyads	n.a.	n.a.	3
Planned co-mentoring dyads	n.a.	n.a.	3
Active co-mentoring dyads	n.a.	n.a.	2
Planned ALE support groups	n.a.	5	5
Active ALE support groups	n.a.	2	4
Planned mentor skill groups	n.a.	3	n.a.
Active mentor skill groups	n.a.	1	n.a.
Planned skill support group	n.a.	n.a.	1
Active skill support group	n.a	n.a.	1

*n.a.: not applicable

The third and last table in this section, Table 6.3, has two parts. The first part summarises the changes that occurred in key elements of the mentoring program. These are the training, participation requirements in the program, the mentor selection process, the matching process, and the specific context in which the mentoring was to take place. The second part summarises changes in the level of participation from key stakeholders in the program.

Mentor training changed from a two-day workshop at the beginning of the phase to ongoing, regular training sessions facilitated by either the H R Development Officer or me. Participation requirements in the support arrangements also changed over time. While in the first phase all mentees had been allocated to triads, in the second and third phase, participation in support structures was voluntary.

Table 6.3. Dimensions of the peer learning support system in each phase

Dimensions	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
About the program			
Upfront mentor training	Yes	Yes	No In-house training
Major focus of mentor training	Attributes of good mentors	Mentoring skills	Contextualised
Participation in mentoring program	Expected	Voluntary	Voluntary
Mentor selection	Invited	Invited	Volunteered or nominated by prospective mentees
Mentor–mentee matching	Pre-matched	Mentee selected mentor	Brokered by HR
Mentoring context	ALE project	ALE project with skill emphasis	ALE project or skills
About program participation			
H R Development Officer	Active in triad	Active in dyad and support group	Very active in all aspects
Managers	Yes, and consistent	Yes, but inconsistent	Peripheral
Researcher	Minimal	Active	Very active

Over the three phases, mentor selection also changed from participants being invited to be mentors by Human Resources, to participants either volunteering or being nominated by prospective mentees to be mentors. The process that matched mentor with mentee underwent significant change as well. In the first phase triads were formed by Human Resources; in the second phase mentees chose mentors from the pool available; in the third phase the H R Development Officer brokered the arrangements.

The format of the action learning projects was also modified from one phase to the next. The major change concerned the extent to which the new skills and concepts from the training workshops were incorporated into the execution of the projects. Phase One participants generally did not incorporate the skills into their projects. In the subsequent phases, emphasis was placed on developing the skills and using the concepts presented at the workshops. For the mentors, this change provided a wider scope for mentoring.

The second part of Table 6.3 summarises the changing levels of active participation in the mentoring program by the H R Development Officer, the managers, and me. The H R Development Officer assumed an increasingly active role in developing the program. This was partly due to his increasing level of understanding and confidence in the capacity of the program to benefit participants and a decreasing level of manager participation as a result of the organisation's changing priorities. My participation also increased and is discussed in detail in Section 6.5 where I explain my changing involvement in the program.

6.3 Why did the support system have so many problems?

The peer learning support system encountered difficulties, particularly in its first twelve months, that rendered its capacity to "support and challenge" learners greatly diminished. In the narrative that unfolded in the last chapter we saw the mentoring dyads, which were the building blocks of the support system, mostly fail to become established. The terms "mentor" and "mentee" met with resistance. In many cases the mentoring relationships stalled at the first meeting or soon after. In others, a first meeting never even took place. Mentors were unwilling or unable to mentor people in the context of the action learning projects and some mentees felt they didn't have much to learn from such relationships anyway. Simply put, very few participants considered the mentor–mentee dyad option of learning support a viable one.

Three fundamental assumptions underpin the establishment of a peer learning support structure as a component of a professional development initiative. The first assumption is that participants bring with them the desire and capacity to learn. The second is that they wish to be supported by their peers in that learning in the support structures made available, and the third is that there are co-participants who are willing and able to offer such support. This study has shown these assumptions to not always be correct.

In retrospect, different reasons can be found to help explain why these assumptions were not universally valid in this case. Some reasons concern the individual participant, some have to do with the organisation, and others concern the peer support structure itself. This section explores these reasons as possible causes for the difficulties incurred in the mentoring program. It concludes that, while all are plausible, it was the incompatibility of the formal mentoring dyad with the context in which it was to function that caused most of the difficulties.

6.3.1 All learners are unique

The learning capacity brought to the Project by each participant was unique and subject to many factors—predictable and unforeseen, acknowledged and tacit. Some were personal variables. Illness, family, and relationship issues, for example, all potentially impacted on participant capacity to maintain an ongoing involvement in the mentoring program. Other factors had to do with personality characteristics, learning styles, and aptitudes. Here I wish to discuss two important elements that contributed to the uniqueness of each participant's capacity to learn in this formal professional development context. These are the beliefs held about training and learning and levels of motivation.

Butler's (1994) model of human action and change points to the significance of one's personal practical knowledge and beliefs in how one acts. The review of the literature on mentoring in Chapter Three showed that beliefs influence the mentor's willingness to mentor and a mentee's willingness to be mentored. This case study supports the importance of beliefs about mentoring to the success of a program and it suggests that there are other beliefs implicated as well. These include beliefs about training and learning.

The participants brought to the Project personal practical knowledge and beliefs about the nature of professional development and the ways they learn in the workplace. While some participants were open to considering and trialling new ways of thinking about training and learning, others were resistant. Of those who did try, some learnt new ways of learning and others returned to their existing practices.

For those participants whose beliefs about training and learning were incompatible with the Project's rationale, the mentoring program had limited or no value. Brett's set of beliefs for example, diametrically opposed those underpinning the Project. Brett was a thirty-five year-old accountant who, in the eighteen months, attended all the workshops but did not engage in any action learning projects. To help explain his disinterest in the action learning projects, he compared his attendance at the workshops to entertainment:

> If I can liken it to the movies. *(Pause.)* You go and watch the movies, it's interesting, it's nice. Two weeks later you know you've watched that movie and you think: What other movies are on this month? You remember bits of the movie that you saw two weeks ago, but you don't remember it from whoa to go. It's been nice, it's been interesting, but you set it aside, and you go on to something else.

Brett was more a consumer of training workshops than a learner. For Brett, the workshop was simultaneously the points of purchase and consumption of knowledge. The action learning project and the mentoring program appeared to hold little or no value for people who shared world views about training similar to Brett's.

They also seemed to hold little or no value for people like Adam, a scientist in his mid-forties. Unlike Brett, Adam did construct himself more as a learner than a consumer. In an email sent to the team a week after the project terminated, Adam acknowledged the learning he had incorporated in his everyday life:

> Your Action Thinking Workshops were so helpful to me in dispelling some of those counter-productive beliefs (models/filters) I have and instilling new models to learn and understand things. Without exception each session left me enlightened and excited with new knowledge....
>
> The projects were of limited benefit to me. They seemed like an unnecessary extra for me—but understandably not so for you researchers. I use the models and tools in many things I do at work and at home with satisfying results. Ask my fellow workers or my family!

Adam's feedback indicates that he believed he did not need the action learning project as a practice field. In his case, his everyday life was the practice field and his co-workers and family provided the feedback. As he had once explained in an interview, this made formal mentoring unnecessary as well.

Like Brett and Adam, there were others who eschewed both the action learning projects and the mentoring program because of their perceived incompatibility with the way they learnt in the workplace. For those who claimed they preferred to learn alone, the idea of a mentor was stifling. Others, who believed they learnt best in informal settings from a number of people, found the seeming formality of the mentoring dyad unsatisfactory and restricting.

Ian, an engineer in his late thirties, was one example. Ian never had formal meetings with the person he nominated as mentor in the second phase. In his explanation he reveals the inappropriateness of the mentoring dyad for him. He contrasts the perceived formality and restrictions of the dyad with the informality and flexibility that characterise the way he believes he learns best in the workplace. Ian begins with explaining why he chose to nominate someone as a mentor in the first place:

> At the time it would've been something that I felt perhaps I should do. It wasn't that I saw a real need. Arthur was the right person if I wanted to talk to somebody, but it could've been any number of people. In fact, it is probably a role that I would exercise with a number of other people anyway. I feel very comfortable with the way that I operate with other people on the program like Jack, or Stan, or Arthur, and there are others. It's informal. I tell them how I'm going and we talk about it while we're doing other things, or you know, in between conversations we're having on other things.
>
> So I guess if I went through it again, I probably would not identify anyone in particular where I'd want to go and sit in a formal, really structured process. It wouldn't worry me if I didn't have somebody. I'd find somebody anyway that I could go and talk to. It might be any one of twenty people.

The mentoring program was superfluous also for those participants who did not have the motivation to work on their action learning projects. Just because the participants had volunteered for the Project did not mean that they were to maintain their desire to do their ALEs. In these cases it appears that the first stage in Lewin's (1953) three-stage change model, the unfreezing stage, was not completed. To take Schein's theory (1993), unfreezing requires participants to experience the two kinds of anxieties that prompt action. While the anxiety that arises from a belief that one's practice is lacking was present in most participants during and after the workshops, the other anxiety, which is the fear-producing one, was not. This anxiety comes from believing that the consequences from not taking action are unacceptable. Why this anxiety was not aroused in some participants could be attributable to a number of factors. These include the content of the professional development project, the choice of action learning project, and the perceived importance of both to everyday performance.

Personal beliefs and the associated motivations about training and how one best learns impacted on a participant's learning capacity in the context of the professional development project. When there continued to be a mismatch between the participant's beliefs and those underpinning the Project and when there was a lack of motivation to become engaged in the action learning projects, the mentoring program encountered problems.

Individual learning capacity however, was not solely determined by the individual. Learning capacity was also influenced, sometimes adversely so, by organisational factors which I discuss in the next subsection.

6.3.2 The organisation is host

The literature review in Chapter Three (Subsection 3.4.1) identified a number of organisational factors that can impact on the success or otherwise of a mentoring program. The organisation's readiness in terms of its culture and its available resources is one of the major determinants of a program's success. Cultural factors include the level of trust operating among co-workers, management support, the organisation's valuing of long-term results, and those elements of the work design that influence the quantity and quality of co-workers' interactions. The amount of budgeted money and time to implement, manage, maintain, and monitor the program are other indicators of the likelihood for success. The literature review also noted that it is useful to explore the compatibility of a mentoring program—and by extension, any peer learning support system—with the individual sub-communities within an organisation.

In this study three organisation-related factors seemed to adversely affect the functioning of the learning support system. The first was the ambiguous status of the mentoring program within the organisation. The second factor was the nature of the work and how it was organised in some parts of the organisation. The third and more complex factor was the reported lack of a mentoring culture in the organisation.

The managers' ongoing verbal support for the mentoring program and their very active participation in at least the first phase were not sufficient in themselves to legitimise the program in the organisation. The ambiguous status of the program derived from its peripheral position in the organisation's practices and its exclusion from the organisation's formal human resource management systems. For example, the mentoring functions associated with the program were not written into job descriptions or performance reviews. This meant there was no formal recognition of existing and newly acquired mentoring expertise and no officially endorsed time to devote to such activities. The one exception to this was in Phase Three where it was agreed and approved by management that the group mentors spend at most an hour to an hour-and-a half a week on formal mentoring-related activities.

The lack of accountability also contributed to the ambiguous status of the mentoring program. Participation in the Project, in any capacity, was voluntary and, once having joined, the level of engagement was also at the participant's discretion. Performance in the Project was not reportable through the normal reporting mechanisms in the organisation. Any time that was spent on the action learning projects or on mentoring-related activities was not formally acknowledged as part of the participant's duties. Consequently commitment to the professional development project was always at the mercy of work priorities and personal inclinations of the participant and sometimes, the supervisor.

The managers' and consultants' reluctance in having the professional development project linked to the organisation's formal reporting systems was discussed in Chapter Four (Subsection 4.3.2). The risks of tying the professional development to the review system or other formal reporting mechanism had been deemed to outweigh the benefits. For the duration of the Project, the problem of legitimising the professional development as part of the daily business of the organisation without compromising the learning principles underpinning it remained unresolved.

Another organisational factor to impact adversely on the mentoring program was the nature of some of the participants' work. Participants whose work required extensive travel or lengthy secondments of several months overseas were unable to sustain their commitment to the Project. When compared with the participation of other staff, the participation of project members from the production side of the operation was the most erratic and in terms of time, the least. Crises and deadlines to do with product and process, supply and demand dictated the working lives of these people. For example, when a crisis in production required shiftwork from the staff in the Casting House, the engagement in the Project from those participants rapidly declined to almost zero.

In a very few isolated cases, supervisors' lack of consistent co-operation also hampered participants' involvement. One participant, for example, abandoned his action learning project because he tired of hiding his notes in a drawer whenever he heard his supervisor coming down the corridor.

The unevenly distributed level of participation across the organisation indicated that some work situations are less suited to action learning projects and mentoring programs—at least of the kinds adopted in this project—than others. Both the action learning projects and the mentoring program required a continuity of engagement over a prolonged period of time.

The last issue I raise in this subsection is the significance of the reported lack of a mentoring culture in explaining the difficulties encountered in the program. In the last few pages of Chapter Four I presented a cultural portrait of the organisation that drew on interviews conducted early in the study in which interviewees claimed that the organisation did not have a mentoring culture. These interviews had occurred immediately after the first training workshops at which the mentoring relationship was spoken about as one that facilitated learning in a supportive and challenging way. The portrait depicted an organisation with a traditional hierarchical management structure and a long serving staff who, in the main, had retained an authoritarian approach to their interactions with subordinates. It took some months before I better understood the significance of that portrait in understanding the difficulties encountered with the mentoring program.

If the reported lack of a mentoring culture meant that the company suffered from a dearth of mentoring relationships, then it could have been argued that unfamiliarity with the mentor–mentee arrangement contributed to the difficulties. It could also have been argued that the same conditions that prevented informal mentoring relationships from developing in the plant also stymied the development of mentoring relationships in the program.

In interviews subsequent to those which I drew on to depict the organisation's cultural readiness for the program, I learned that, at various times, most participants had enjoyed good informal mentoring relationships at the plant either in the capacity of mentor or mentee. Many were able to identify relationships that they were currently in as mentoring relationships. In fact, it was participants' personal practical knowledge about mentoring that had made them very critical of the mentoring program. Unfamiliarity with the notion of mentoring relationships—at least of the informal kind—was not a factor contributing to the difficulties.

I also came to realise that most of the participant perceptions forming the basis for the cultural sketch in Chapter Four referred to the interaction between staff and operators. In some respects, these two groups constituted the two social classes in the organisation, with management possibly being a third. Evidence indicating communication barriers and a dictatorial style of supervision between staff and operators occasionally surfaced at mentor meetings and also in interviews and casual conversations I had around the plant. Given this, I concluded that most of the interviewees were lamenting the absence of a "mentoring style" of interaction between staff and operators that was not contingent on the existence of a traditional mentor–mentee relationship.

This staff–operator dynamic however, was not relevant to the case because all the participants in the Project were staff members. What arguably was relevant was the participants' lack of experience in using a mentoring style of interaction in everyday work with either co-staff members or operators with whom they did not have informal mentoring relationships. This conclusion was supported by the mentors' reports at the mentor meetings, which revealed, again and again, the inability of most mentors to generate meaningful dialogue with their mentees about their individual projects. In summary, it was the absence of a mentoring style from the repertoire of interaction modalities used between co-workers, whether they be staff and operators, in everyday work that may have arrested the development of mentoring dyads. It was not a lack of informal mentoring experience.

So far I have discussed the possibility that characteristics of individual learners and of the organisation contributed to the program's difficulties. In the next subsection I consider how the Project's design contributed to the problems experienced by both participants and management.

6.3.3 The formal mentoring dyad has limits

Being unable to fully account for and accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the individual learner and the organisation only partly explains why the mentoring program enjoyed little success. Undoubtedly the most significant cause of the difficulties was the design of the peer support structure itself, particularly when it had the traditional mentor–mentee dyad as its basis. This case showed very clearly that there are limits to the contexts in which the dyad can become established and thrive and there are limits to how far the model of "natural" mentoring can be tampered with in the name of adaptation and improvement.

In retrospect, there appears to have been three major reasons for most mentoring dyads failing to flourish. First, the specific context of the action learning project itself was inappropriate. Second, the intended mentoring relationship did not fit comfortably with participants' existing notions of what a mentoring relationship should be like. Third, and of critical significance, the intended mentoring relationship did not fit comfortably within the existing web of relationships in which the participants belonged. In the rest of this subsection I explore these possible explanations by drawing on the experiences of the participants and their own reflections of those experiences.

As we saw in Chapter Three, much of the literature on mentoring programs deals with how they should be implemented in an organisation. It offers many recommendations and warnings about the logistics of selecting, matching, training, and evaluating. As we heard in the narrative, in different ways and at different times, all of these were issues in this program as well. Some participants didn't consider people who had been selected as mentors worthy of the title. The matching process went through three iterations and finally experienced some limited success—but only in those cases that the literature would have suggested there would be success. The emphases in the training changed from the first set of mentor workshops to the next by downplaying the image of the ideal mentor as the model to be emulated. Managerial concern and activity about evaluation and outcomes also ebbed and flowed. While these components of selecting, matching, training, and evaluating did pose some problems, any discussion of them is unlikely to add anything new to what we already know from the literature. Furthermore, there were other elements that arguably had far more impact. These were the context in which the mentoring was to occur and the untenable situation in which the mentors were placed.

What the literature doesn't discuss to any great length are the characteristics of the specific context in which the mentoring takes place. Apart from noting that successful mentoring requires sufficient interaction between mentor and mentee (for example, Billett, McCann & Scott, 1999), the context is usually presented as a given. This is understandable because for most formal mentoring programs, the mentoring arena is the mentee's everyday work and therefore it *is* a given. In fact, this is the basis for formal mentoring being a potentially powerful learning strategy. It allows mentoring to be a learning intervention that is an "on the job" or even an "in the job" activity. Feedback is immediate and learning is directly related to the work and therefore very practical.

In this study the specific mentoring context was problematic. Mentors were sometimes from other work areas to those of the mentees and the action learning projects were not always firmly embedded in the everyday work of the learner. In some cases, participants selected topics that, while important, were not essential to how they performed their work.

Notwithstanding the soundness of action learning projects as a tool for learning (Lawrence, 1994; Marsick, 1990; Revans, 1982), there were irremediable weaknesses in how the concept was operationalised in this professional development project. In many cases, these weaknesses made mentoring redundant, unwelcomed, or unworkable.

The mentoring relationship immediately became redundant when participants' engagement with their projects stopped altogether or was delayed for a long time. In some instances, participants abandoned their projects immediately after the off-site training workshops while others disengaged several weeks later. In a few cases, no project activity took place until a few weeks before the end of the phase when, in anticipation of Celebration Day, participants would embark on a flurry of activity.

When efforts were made to develop a mentoring relationship, logistical difficulties often swamped attempts. For some, the usual work commitments and pressures that had been absent for the few days of the workshop flooded back into their lives upon their return to their normal environment. Action learning projects and mentoring relationships were squeezed out of their minds and off their agendas. Despite good intentions, workplace priorities or procedures would sometimes precipitously change, making earlier "to do" lists, including action learning projects, unnecessary or unaccomplishable.

For some participants whose work routine remained fairly constant and comfortable, projects still managed to die away quietly. What may have seemed a burning issue at the time of the workshop no longer roused that same urgency to change once back into the lull of daily habit.

Mentors often did not know whether their mentees were working on their projects or not. The most common pattern of interaction was limited to a quick "How's it going?" in the corridor to which mentees would give perfunctory replies that did not invite further dialogue about ALEs. Rarely was the question an entrée into meaningful learning interactions. At its most innocuous, it served a phatic function only. At its most unsatisfactory, it seemed to carry overtones of surveillance that were unwelcomed by mentor and mentee alike. It made each feel that the mentor was "checking up" on the mentee.

When the mentors knew that their assigned mentees had stopped work on their projects, they reported that they did not feel they had the obligation, the responsibility, or the authority to take any kind of action. In their view, the mentees' engagement with their projects was *a priori* to their assuming any mentoring role. They also felt they did not have the skills to either challenge their mentees on their non-activity or to help them revive or redefine their projects. In the cases where participant progress had stalled, many mentors, again, did not know how to respond other than to say, "Let me know if you need a hand."

The lack of expertise in generating learning interactions with co-workers was one area of several where many mentors did not have the necessary knowledge and skills. This lack of relevant expertise exacerbated the difficulties in establishing effective relationships. As one mentee explained:

> When I started doing this whole process I couldn't see any reason to go and talk to anybody about it because everyone was staggering along blind as much as I was. And I'm not going to waste my time talking to someone who, from my point of view, knows less about it than I do.

If there is a single element common to the many definitions of formal mentoring found in the literature, it is the prerequisite of mutually acknowledged expertise differentials between mentor and mentee (Gibb, 1999). While other elements such as rapport, respect, and trust also make for an effective mentoring relationship, the expertise factor is critical for the relationship to have some sort of justification acceptable to both halves of the formal dyad. For the mentor, it produces the confidence that she has something worthwhile to contribute and that is valued by the mentee. For the mentee, it produces the confidence that the relationship will result in relevant learning and his time will not be wasted.

That such an apparently obvious condition was absent in this program raises the question, "Why was it missing?" The question is worth exploring because the answers reveal the risks in reworking the informal or naturally occurring mentoring relationship in contexts that are arguably too different from those in which informal mentoring successfully occurs.

In Chapter One and then again in more detail in Chapter Three (Section 3.2) I sketched the path that has taken the notion of mentor from that of the ideal figure to that of the more prosaic and utilitarian "facilitator of learning" found in formal mentoring programs of the kind in this study. The bridge that took mentoring from the informal context to the formal or organised. were programs designed for career development. These programs attempted to retain features of informal mentoring. Mentors were chosen for their *existing* expertise. This expertise was the industry-specific and firm-specific expertise (Becker, 1964; Pennings, Lee, & Van Witteloostuijn, 1998) accumulated over years of experience in the job as well as through life experience. How this was to be shared with the protégés was left to the mentors who were usually in existing relationships with their protégés as superiors and managers. For the most part, this has now changed.

The human yen to improve on what is present has led program designers to modify and adapt the naturally occurring mentoring dynamic. Mentor training has become a standard component of mentor programs. Skills and knowledge in the art or craft of mentoring is recognised as a defined area of expertise in its own right and is considered amenable to improvement through training intervention. More modifications and improvement measures have led to using the mentoring concept to introduce new knowledge and skills into an organisation—new to the mentees but also new to the mentors.

The range of expertise that is potentially required of mentors in mentoring programs today is shown in Table 6.4 where two hypothetical programs at the ends of the continuum are compared. The first column lists the kinds of expertise required by a program that is of "best fit" with mentors' existing expertise. The demands of such a program in terms of expertise would be similar to the expertise resources that mentors bring to informal mentoring relationships. The second column lists the kinds of expertise that a program of "least fit" with the informal mentoring context would demand. Such programs require the most areas of expertise, including areas that mentors, by virtue of the program design, do not usually possess.

Table 6.4. Comparison of expertise expectations in mentoring programs

Mentoring program of best fit	Mentoring program of least fit
Existing mentoring expertise • Contextualised	Existing mentoring expertise • Decontextualised
Industry-specific expertise • Declarative knowledge • Procedural knowledge or PPK	Industry-specific expertise • Declarative knowledge • Procedural knowledge or PPK
Firm-specific expertise • Declarative knowledge • Procedural knowledge or PPK	Firm-specific expertise • Declarative knowledge • Procedural knowledge or PPK
	Expertise in new content • Declarative knowledge • Procedural knowledge or PPK
	Expertise in specific mentoring style • Declarative knowledge • Procedural knowledge or PPK

Along the continuum that has these exemplars as the two end points, the program in this study, as originally implemented, was located well toward the end of "least fit." Most mentors, at least in their earlier mentoring assignments, did not possess much of the expertise required by the program.

The worth of the mentoring expertise that mentors brought to the program was severely devalued when they were placed in contexts very different from the contexts where their mentoring expertise *did* have currency. As well as the action learning projects being new settings for mentoring, the mentors sometimes had mentees they did not know well or with whom they had little rapport. One mentor, who was well regarded for his mentoring capacity, officially withdrew from the mentoring program for this very reason. Once his mentoring expertise was decontextualised, it had become almost worthless. Here he explains why he was unable to mentor in the program:

> I have no common ground with the people that I'm trying to relate to in regard to the ALEs. With other people that I'm working around, I find it very easy. There's a sort of understanding of what's going on, you know, like knowing why you have had a bad couple of weeks in terms of the job. You know what's going on in general. With most of the people around here I would have no difficulty in that sense I don't think.

The value of the mentors' industry- and firm- specific expertise was also questionable in the context of the program. The value of this expertise depended on its relevance to the topics mentees chose for their action learning projects. In some cases, this expertise, which forms the very basis of more conventional mentoring programs, was of little or no value. A mentor who may have been a fine chemist and mentor in his laboratory may not have been an effective mentor for a mentee whose action learning project was on time management.

Finally the expertise possessed by the mentors in the relatively esoteric content of the training workshops that had learning about one's learning as its objective was very limited. It was also limited in the style of mentoring preferred in the Project. Some mentors did not have the skills to support and especially challenge mentees in their learning. Later in the program, yet another expertise requirement was to emerge for the group mentors when they were to facilitate learning in peer groups.

In retrospect, it is clear that this program placed many mentors in a situation where they did not have the necessary expertise to be mentors. Their existing areas of expertise were of limited worth and their limited experience in the new concepts and skills of the action thinking workshops, and of the mentoring workshops had not yet produced the desired new expertise.

So far in this section concerning the difficulties wrought by the actual design of the Project, I have looked at the action learning project and the issue of the mentors' expertise. Another source of difficulties was the different and sometimes conflicting notions of mentoring that participants brought to the program. In interviews, at mentor meetings, and at group sessions such as the Celebration Days, participants articulated the dissonance they felt between their own beliefs or experience of mentoring and their experience in the mentoring program.

For some participants the notion of the "ideal mentor" loomed large and by comparison, their assigned mentors inevitably failed to meet the standard. Implicit in these idealised constructions was a status and hierarchical differential between mentor and mentee made justifiable by the mentor's expertise and wisdom. When expectations were not met, a common response from these mentees was a cynicism about the selection criteria used to choose mentors for the program. In their view, the title of mentor had been bestowed on someone not worthy of such an honour.

Even for some mentors, the spectre of the ideal mentor made them feel inadequate. One mentor who referred to her mentees as "her people" and her triad as a mutual support group described her notion of a mentor as follows:

> I see a true mentor like a demigod sort of thing—you know, someone who knows everything, who knows the best for you, and has only your best intentions at heart. All those sort of things.

Experiences of effective informal mentoring also had a major influence on the participants' expectations of the mentoring relationships in the program. Some of these experiences were described as conventional mentor–mentee relationships (although almost always in retrospect), but in most cases, they were not. A more common learning relationship was one where at different times in the relationship one or the other would have identified themselves as the learner. One computer programmer described his very effective informal mentoring relationship with a co-worker as "a two-way street."

The private and unobtrusive nature of informal mentoring contrasted dramatically with the formally labelled arrangement offered by the program where participants were officially and publicly positioned as mentor or mentee. Informal mentoring experiences almost always had no labels attached and often went unrecognised as mentoring at the time of the relationship or interaction. One mentor, Jack, who had been at the plant for over thirty years concluded only after joining the program that, in effect, he had been mentoring many of his co-workers over those years:

> People are continually knocking on my door, I had never put a name to it, but now I know that it is a mentoring role that I am doing.

Successful informal relationships also produced seemingly unrealisable expectations of the mentoring dyad in the program. The excellent relationship that one young graduate called Tim had with a senior engineer was such an example. This relationship was informal in the sense that there was no mentoring program at the plant when Tim was recruited. However, it was a formal relationship in that management had deliberately placed the novice under the supervision of an expert. Here Tim identifies the positive qualities of that relationship by comparing it with less successful relationships:

> Mario has been a really good mentor to me. It was natural when you come in as a graduate to be put in the office next door to him. He is a senior engineer and he took me under his wing type of thing. But I have worked under other more senior engineers at other places during my training and got absolutely nothing from them. Bugger all learning, bugger all friendship, and coming out of their office feeling very disheartened. One I remember was hell. I remember asking myself, "Why am I not learning anything from this person? Why do I bother? Why am I even doing engineering?" Well, I didn't feel any of those things with Mario. In fact if anything, he convinced me that what I was doing was the right thing to do.

This relationship displayed most, if not all, of the eight mentoring functions from Jacobi's (1991) list of fifteen that I identified in Chapter Three (Section 3.2.2) as being transferable from the career development context to other learning contexts. These functions are reproduced here because they were also the functions that mentees were seeking, often to no avail, from their mentors in this mentoring program:

- Providing acceptance/support/encouragement
- Clarifying values or goals
- Coaching
- Providing information
- Being a role model
- Giving advice or guidance
- Providing training instruction
- Stimulating acquisition of knowledge

The fact that the conditions did not exist in the program to produce the rich learning experienced in relationships such as Tim's with his supervisor led many participants, both mentors and mentees alike, to feel disillusioned with the concept of the mentoring program.

It is reasonable to assume that the beliefs and concepts participants hold about mentoring, mentors, and mentees help determine how they embed the formal mentoring dyad into their pre-existing relationships in the workplace. For many participants in this case study, the formal dyad did not fit comfortably within the existing web of relationships. The early and persistent resistance to the use of the terms "mentor" and "mentee" by both the nominated mentors and mentees was evidence that the relationship did not "sit right." This became more evident in Phase Two when, despite mentees being able to select their own mentors, relationships, in most cases, still did not eventuate.

Tom, an engineer, related the most explicit demonstration of participant reluctance to disrupt the inter-relational status quo. Tom was strongly committed to the professional development project overall and to the mentoring program. In the second phase, when formal mentoring was not compulsory, Tom chose Julian, a co-worker for whom he had a great deal of respect professionally and personally, to be his mentor. Unlike most other dyads, a very successful learning relationship ensued. Even more significant was that Tom never told Julian that he had selected him for his mentor. He reveals his reasons in an interview toward the end of that phase:

> Tom: I see Julian on a fairly regularly basis and so if I am working on something to do with my ALE then it is very easy to slip into a discussion about it. It happens almost on a weekly basis that we discuss things related to the project. I will go in and ask him a

question and say, "I have been thinking about this, what do you reckon?" But quite honestly it never came into my head to tell him that he was my mentor. I prefer to have it very informal and just sort of throw ideas around. I find it much better that way.

Jo: You are assuming that if you had told him then somehow things might have changed?

Tom: Yeah, bloody oath. The fact that I didn't tell him was deliberate. I just prefer it that way. I really do.

Jo: What made you think that things would change?

Tom: I think we are too close on a personal basis. I know him too well. I also know him outside of work. Also by my saying straight out, "I have chosen you as a mentor," I would feel more obliged to structure formal meetings. I don't think that's a good idea for me. And knowing Julian, that would also have made him feel obliged. And I didn't want that.

Jo: Do you think perhaps he was not a good choice?

Tom: No, he is, definitely. I selected him for the very reason that I enjoy having discussions with him. He comes up with different ideas and he is quite a logical thinker and that appeals to me. So it was deliberate that I chose him and the fact that I didn't tell him was also deliberate. *(Pause.)* You're having a lot of difficulty with this aren't you? It doesn't sit well. *(Both laughing.)*

Jo: Yeah, I am. *(Pause.)* For one thing, I know that Julian thinks he didn't have anyone to mentor this phase.

Tom: Interesting.

Jo: Tom, would "the friend" variable still have prevented you from telling him if the support structure had been called a co-mentoring arrangement?

Tom: Yeah, well, you see, if you had asked me to describe this "Clayton's" mentoring relationship I've been in, I would have said that we have been co-mentoring each other. We do that anyway.

The reasons for Tom not telling Julian that he had selected him as his mentor were shared by others who had done likewise. They also resonated with the explanations provided by those who after the first brief announcement to their nominated mentors, did not refer to it again in any further conversations.

A major concern was that the normal pattern of interaction, which had been working well, would be disrupted with possible negative consequences for both parties. In Tom's case the perceived formality of the arrangement that seemed to require regular scheduled meetings dedicated to one's ALE did not personally suit his preferred way of learning.

Also of concern was that same formality seemed to carry with it a burden of responsibility and extra work for the mentor which mentees were reluctant to impose on their friends and respected colleagues. This reason finds support in equity theories explaining why people seek or do not seek help that Little (1990) uses as one explanation for why mentees engage in mentoring relationships. This theory suggests that people like Tom are concerned about the potential loss of parity in their existing relationship because the formal mentoring function is likely to have more benefit for the mentee than for the mentor.

Finally Tom's story indicates a concern that the mentor–mentee arrangement would disequilibrate the existing status balance within the relationship. From Tom's perspective at least, his and Julian's successful relationship was one of equals. They enjoyed a co-mentoring relationship which meant that the learner/learned positioning of the formal mentor–mentee dyad did not exist. At various times each was the learner or the learned. The connotations of inferiority/superiority that the mentor–mentee arrangement held were not appropriate to their existing relationship.

Tom's story demonstrated the dis-ease that participants felt with introducing the formal mentor–mentee dynamic into their existing relationships and modes of interaction. For reasons similar to Tom's, participants were reluctant to impose on existing relationships, however strong or weak they may have been, the social and psychological weight that was perceived to come with the formal mentoring relationship.

This section has taken in turn the learner, the organisation, and then the Project design itself as the foci to explore why the mentoring program encountered the difficulties it did. For a number of reasons relating to these three elements, many participants did not have the learning capacity required by the professional development project; many could not or did not wish to be supported by their peers in mentor–mentee arrangements; and many of the nominated mentors were unwilling or unable to assume the role of mentor.

Notwithstanding the seemingly insurmountable difficulties, the peer learning support system did not collapse. It changed and evolved into a structure that engaged more participants in more interactions that had the potential to improve their own and their co-workers' learning. In the next section I reflect on why the program changed from being a dyadic based support system to one that was predominantly group based and from one that provided one option of support to one that offered multiple options.

6.4 Why did the mentoring program evolve in the way it did?

The changes in the peer support arrangements and in the other structural aspects described in Section 6.2 were only some of the more overt changes that took place in the mentoring program. The quality and frequency of interactions within the participant group also changed as did the knowledge and identity resources (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) held by individuals and by the group as a whole. Particularly significant was the accumulation of personal practical knowledge in how one's own learning occurred, in how to support co-workers in their learning, and in the areas of thinking and reflection that comprised the substance of the training workshops.

The question that this section seeks to answer lies at the heart of the case study. The context setting and stage play of Chapters Four and Five gave a narrative explanation for why the program evolved in the way it did. Here I answer the question by interpreting the narrative as a story of learning. I argue that the program evolved in the way it did because learning was happening through the interactions that held this group of participants together for a common purpose (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Using this perspective the question now becomes one of why, and how, the learning occurred.

The immediate response that comes to mind in considering why the learning support system evolved is that it could. This section therefore begins with identifying the pre-existing conditions that allowed the possibility for change to occur.

The proposition I then explore is how, over the eighteen-month period, the group of participants became a community of practice. This section will reinterpret what happened in the mentoring program in terms of the three dimensions of practice that Wenger (1998) identifies as contributing to community coherence. These are the mutual engagement of participants, the negotiation of a joint enterprise, and the development of a shared repertoire. While these functions in themselves are evidence that learning was experienced, I will then identify characteristics that this community of practice displayed that are indicative of a learning community as described by Wenger (1998), Falk and Kilpatrick (2000), and Schein (1993).

6.4.1 Preconditions permitting the possibility of learning

The kinds of learning experienced by the group depended on pre-existing conditions pertaining to both the organisation and to the design of the Project. While these circumstances in themselves did not guarantee that learning would occur or that the program would evolve in any particular way, they provided the space, time, and wherewithal for change to occur—if the participants so chose.

The first resource made available to participants was time. Because learning is a function of experience, which in turn, is a function of time, sufficient time to interact, to experience the action learning projects and the mentoring arrangements, and to trial new ways of support was a necessity. With one or two exceptions, most participants had time to work on their ALEs and to regularly meet in their dyads or groups. For the duration of the Project, the mentors had official time to meet as a group of mentors.

The second invaluable resource made available to the participants was space. As much as time, space, too, is necessary to interact either formally or informally in groups. The plant was dotted with well-appointed small meeting areas, both formal and informal, and larger conference rooms. Venues were easily booked for mentor meetings, support group meetings, think-tank sessions, and participant presentations.

The organisation provided other resources that could potentially have impacted on the program's development. There was funding for purchasing relevant books. These were purchased and housed in the library and, as it turned out, frequently borrowed. Funding was also made available for me to attend a professional development conference with the proviso that I presented a summary of relevant papers to the participants upon my return.

Another important resource which was to become incorporated into the practices of the participant group was the electronic mail system. In the beginning, not all staff members were familiar with its use, but over time it became a communication medium used for many purposes relevant to the Project. It was used for private communication but it was also used for group emails. Through email, meetings were advertised, reminders given, information distributed and information sought from people sharing common interests in a particular learning area.

In addition to the resources provided by the organisation, the design of the Project contributed to providing the environment for the program to evolve. At the end of each phase, participants had the capacity to make modifications to the structural components of the Project based on their previous six months of experience. The mentoring program, the content of the training workshops, and the format of the action learning projects were all open to modification. This flexibility was to provide the mentoring program relatively easy transitions from one form to another.

Participants also had access to knowledge resources that potentially were very pertinent to any change process. The new concepts and skills on reflection and thinking presented at the workshop were as applicable to the context of the mentoring program as they were to individuals' action learning projects. In practice, participants used new tools such as reflection skills and de Bono's (1990, 1992) thinking techniques to evaluate the program and to think of new and better ways of supporting and challenging co-workers in their learning. As importantly, many of the tools became integrated into the routinised practices of the mentors' interactions at their meetings.

The last important factor that, in hindsight, proved to be the catalyst for the program evolving in the way it did was the decision made by the original ten mentors to meet as a group on a weekly basis. Made at the very beginning of the program, that commitment was based on two beliefs. First, most of the mentors had experienced action learning projects in the earlier professional development project delivered by the Chief Investigators. They had concluded that they would have had better outcomes if there had been some form of ongoing support back on the plant. As mentors they were prepared to offer that in this project. Second, they believed that, just as their fellow participants would benefit from support, they, too, needed support. They decided that regular mentor meetings would provide such support.

The decision made by the mentors to meet regularly was to impact on the development of the program in a most fundamental way. Although the triads and dyads were not to succeed, the mentor meetings survived. They proved to be the ongoing source of intense interaction between a group of people committed to developing a learning support system that worked. This common purpose, which was not well understood for many, many months, was nevertheless sufficient to hold the group together long enough to form the beginnings of a learning community. Furthermore, the mentor group model was to become the prototype for the learning support group arrangements implemented later in the program.

The time, space, and other resources provided by the company, the specific knowledge resources provided by the training workshops, the cyclic design of the Project, together with the ten-strong committed mentor group created the favourable conditions for the program to evolve into a community of practice.

6.4.2 Building a community of practice

Wenger's (1998) theory on the processes binding a community of practice together, which was discussed in Chapter Three, is based on studies of groups of people that are already functioning as communities of practice. When this study began, neither the participant group nor the mentor group could be described as a well-defined community having a "shared history of learning" (p. 93) or a "regime of competence" (p. 136). Formal mentoring in the context of the professional development project was a new experience as were the action learning projects and the concepts and skills of the training workshops. Over subsequent months, the participant group, and especially the mentor group, began to evolve in a way that resonated with Wenger's model of a community of practice. In this section I demonstrate how the group went about developing the three dimensions of a community of practice that Wenger identifies as the mutual engagement of participants, negotiating a joint enterprise, and creating a shared repertoire.

Table 6.5 lists examples of the kinds of activity and interactions in the participant group that contributed to developing each of these three dimensions. The stage play in Chapter Five attempted to represent the lived experience of these activities and interactions. Rather than repeating the detail here, I want to explore some of the ways that the relationship between the emerging community of practice and the organisation in which it was embedded impacted on the development of these three dimensions.

The interconnections between the new community of practice that the participant group was struggling to become and its host organisation which was already an established community-of-communities (Brown & Duguid, 1994) impacted on most aspects of the participants' activity. Viewed positively, the relationship was the basis for the new community's common purpose. The purpose of the professional development project and the learning support system was ultimately to improve participants' professional performance in the organisation. In addition, the action learning projects, which were the context for the peer support, were conducted in working hours as part of the participants' everyday activity in the organisation. In other words, the community of practice had no reason for being if it had not been part of the organisation.

However, the connection also brought issues to do with existing relationships, identities, practices, and norms that in some respects, impeded the development of the new community of practice. While the neophytic community of purpose had no shared repertoire, joint enterprise, or patterns of engagement specific to its intended purpose, its members brought with them extensive knowledge and identity resources from their memberships in the sub-communities of the organisation. When the professional development project and the mentoring scheme began, the participants were already knitted into patterns of interaction with their co-workers, already had patterns of thinking and doing in their work, and already had identities defined within these patterns. Aspects of some of these patterns were a liability to the fledging community and inhibited the capacity of some to participate more fully in the enterprise.

Table 6.5. Dimensions of a community of practice evident in the support system

Dimensions	Examples
Mutual engagement of participants	Interacting informally and formally, face-to-face and via electronic mail in the context of the project and for a common purpose
	Creating and maintaining a group identity
	Developing shared ways of understanding what mentoring meant in this context (homogeneity)
	Developing different roles and tasks within the group (differentiation)
	Sharing responsibilities including turn taking for various tasks such as giving presentations, chairing meetings
	Building confidence in group's pool of competence
	Developing ways of communicating with one another using a "mentoring style" of interaction
	Exercising leadership within the group
	Developing a communal sense of ownership of the action learning projects and support system
	Constructing public identities of oneself and of one's co-participants as learners
	Developing relationships different from those already existing
Negotiating a joint enterprise	Negotiating within the participant group what it means to support one another's learning in the context of the project
	Fine tuning the common purpose of the peer learning support
	Reconciling conflicting interpretations of what mentoring means and what it could mean in the context of the project
	Learning what is possible given commitments
	Considering different support structures and protocols
	Developing experiential knowledge as individuals and as a group in the different areas of expertise needed by the peer support system
	Refining the structure of the action learning project task
Creating a shared repertoire	Using new language introduced at workshops in interactions
	Producing in-house documents such as a unique "CRL" version of Butler's Thinking Action model, tool kit comprising summaries of relevant articles and notes on skills, agendas and minutes of meetings; mentoring manual
	Developing routines such as regular meetings and meeting formats
	Accumulation and sharing of personal practical knowledge about the project formally and informally among members
	Creating, trialling, and keeping or discarding different support arrangements and different practices at meetings
	Symbolic significance of the red "think book"
	Creating and sharing lists of resources

Included in these aspects was the general lack of a mentoring style of interaction between employees and especially between staff members and their managers or supervisors. For example, expertise in facilitative questioning and effective listening for the purposes of fostering learning was not well-developed. This meant that in the context of the professional development project many participants did not know how to converse with co-workers in a way to support and challenge them in their learning. In some cases, the necessary levels of trust for open and constructive dialogue were also not present.

The lack of a mentoring style was particularly evident in the interactions at the mentor meetings in the first phase and most of the second phase. This period coincided with managers being active members of the mentor group. With one or two exceptions, mentors rarely spoke at length about their own mentoring arrangements or concerns and even more rarely questioned one another on their mentoring experiences. The main exception to this was the Acting General Manager, who, during his time in the program, was a very active participant at mentor meetings and very open about his concerns.

In an almost palpable way the presence of the managers at mentor meetings seemed to have a censoring effect on the contribution that many of the other mentors made. Yet, when the managers and especially the Acting General Manager first began to regularly absent themselves from the meetings in the second half of the second phase, constructive dialogue trickled to almost nothing. I explored this issue with one of the mentors who was also a supervisor:

> Mentor: The Acting G.M. has been noticeable by his absence so I guess what I'm saying is that the mentor group doesn't have a mentor.
>
> Jo: Any one of you can take on that role.
>
> Mentor: You're right, absolutely.
>
> Jo: Because you, too, have those skills. So why don't people do that, you think? Is it a fear of invading privacy?
>
> Mentor: Actually that flashed through my mind just before you said it. But, I guess it's one of those things where, because of our professional standing in the organisation, we say and do things. It comes back a lot to the fact that we've spent 20, 25, 30 years in a hierarchical

environment. We all come from diverse backgrounds all over the country, but everywhere that everybody's worked for the past 20 years it has been pretty much hierarchical and managers have the final say as it were. So I guess his position more than his standing gives him security in asking and prying and it's that security I guess which is the significant thing. And I don't see this organisation has matured enough for that security to be something you don't have to think about.

The regular absence of the managers from the mentor meetings was to eventually have a positive effect on the development of the group as a community of practice. It allowed for a safer learning space (Schein, 1993) for new kinds of interaction to occur and for new identities to form as participants spoke with different voices from different social positions within the group. Some, including the H R Development Officer, assumed leadership functions that seemed unavailable when the managers had been part of the group.

This case showed that, perhaps unlike other kinds of communities of practice, peer learning support systems have features that warrant special attention. One feature looked at in this subsection is its intrinsic connections with the larger community of practice—the organisation—of which it is a part. Another feature, which I discuss next, is the nature of its common purpose.

6.4.3 Becoming a learning community

The distinction between a community of practice and a learning community is made here to provide a way of changing emphases in discussing the experience of the participants in this peer learning support system. As this section has already shown, becoming a community of practice in itself means that learning was taking place. The interactions that contributed to producing a mutual engagement between members, to negotiating a common enterprise, and to developing a shared repertoire were learning interactions because they changed the knowledge and identity resources within the participant group. Unlike many other communities of practice however, the common purpose of this community was specifically concerned with learning.

In different but compatible ways, Wenger (1998), Falk and Kilpatrick (2000), and Schein (1993) identify those characteristics and dimensions displayed by a community of practice that has learning embodied in its common purpose. These were described in Chapter Three. In this subsection I reflect on how this community enhanced its learning capacity in terms of three of those dimensions, namely: through building appropriate kinds of social capital; through working its relationships with significant communities external to it; and through developing a continuity of experience.

6.4.3.1 Building social capital

The community cohesion that comes about through the mutual engagement of participants, the negotiating of a common enterprise, and the development of a shared repertoire of skills, artefacts, and conceptual tools, is discussed here in terms of social capital building. Social capital refers to those useful resources that a community accesses or accrues by virtue of the norms, networks, and trust within that community (Coleman, 1988; Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Leenders & Gabbay, 1999b; Portes, 1998). The norms, networks, and trust are simultaneously generators of social capital and the results of social capital (Gabbay & Leenders, 1999). These elements of social structure also impact on the conditions that allow learning or the creation of new intellectual capital to occur (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Social capital building is an indicator of a learning community (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) and is evidenced in the extent to which its knowledge and the identity resources contribute to its common purpose.

In this section I contrast the dynamics of the group at the beginning of the eighteen-month period with those at the end as a way of discussing some of the interrelationships between structure, social capital, and learning. The set of tables at the beginning of this chapter summarised the changes that occurred in the mentoring program. However, they did not give enough indication of how the nature of the dynamics within the participant group changed as the social arrangements changed. Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2 on the next page represent the start and end points of the mentoring program respectively and illustrate these changes.

The dominant impression that these diagrams convey is a sense of the increased complexity of the support system in the third phase. This complexity

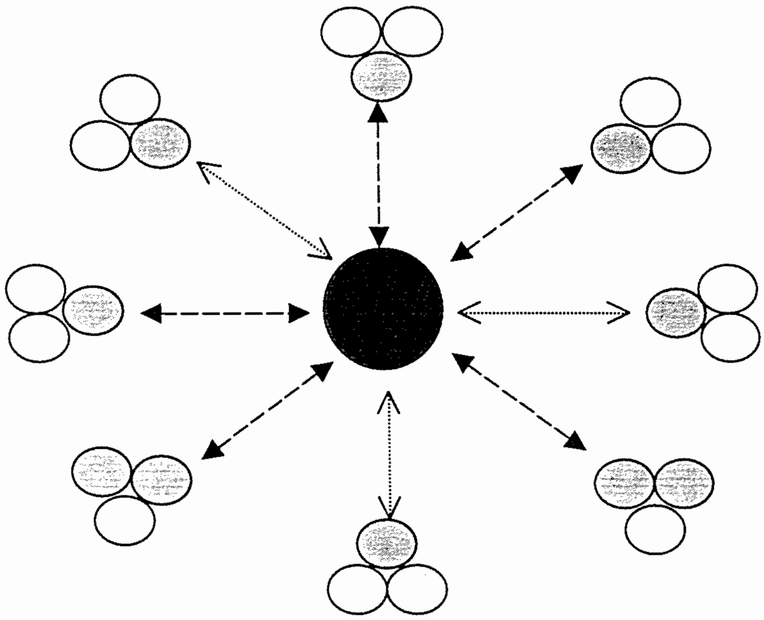

Figure 6.1. Support arrangements at the beginning of Phase One

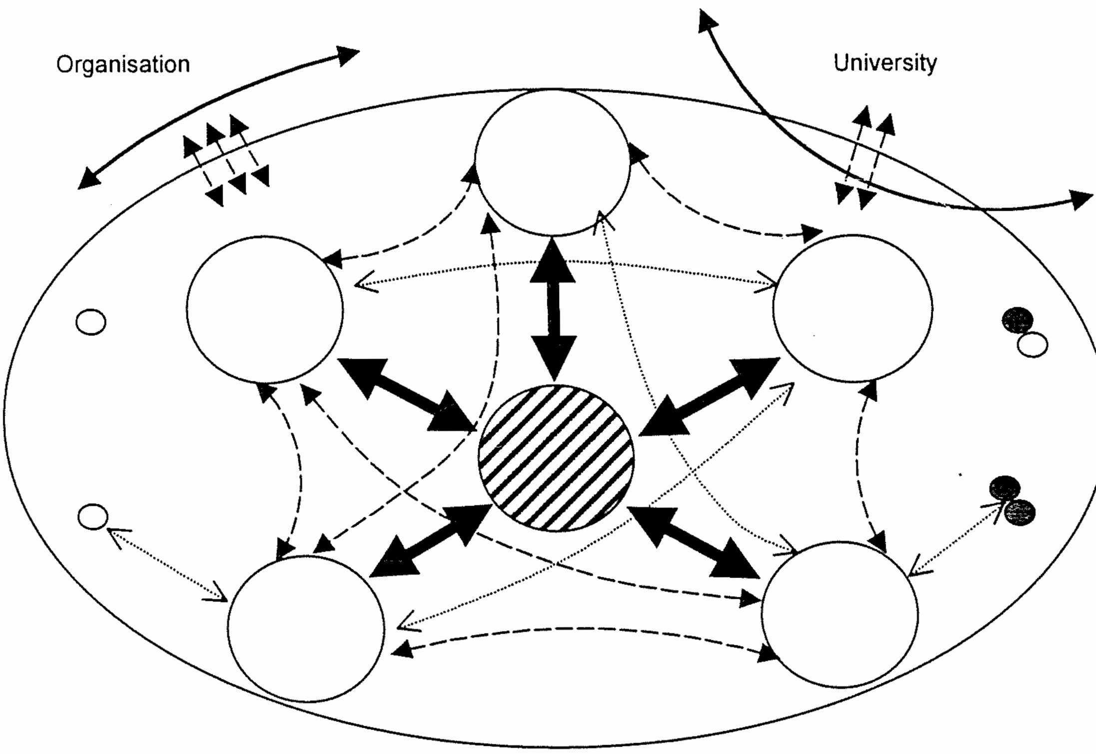

Figure 6.2. Support arrangements at the end of Phase Three

stems from the increased number of different kinds of social groupings and the patterns of interactions linking them. In the first phase the only support arrangement for the mentees was the triad which was replicated eight times. Other than for the mentors, there was no infrastructure in the design that facilitated formal communication between the members of one triad and those of another. The success of this arrangement depended on participants accepting the norms associated with a mentor–mentee relationship, on adequate levels of trust existing between mentor and the mentee, and on both mentors and mentee bringing to the relationship adequate knowledge resources of the appropriate kinds. As we saw in the narrative and the earlier sections of this chapter the triad model was not successful.

By the third phase, there was a diverse range of social arrangements. Participants had the option of being formally involved in any kind(s) of support arrangement. Most were group based configurations that were unrelated to the mentor–mentee dyadic structure. The small group structure proved to be more aligned with the ways that people learned in this particular worksite.

Associated with the different kinds of support arrangements in the third phase, new and different kinds of links and interconnections emerged within the community. These occurred through a number of ways. Because participants could have multiple memberships of whatever groupings they wished, the overlapping memberships generated the possibility for inter-group exchange of information. Because the H R Development Officer met with all participants at least twice during the third phase and regularly sat in on the meetings of all the groups, he, too, carried information and ideas from one group to the next. The group mentors meeting fortnightly also facilitated the conditions for the combination and exchange of intellectual capital (see Figure 3.1) within and across groups. Other interconnections across the community of practice were created by the group mentors' practice of inviting guest members to their groups to share ideas. They also encouraged core members to invite other participants to their meetings as visiting members. Sometimes a support group would organise a special presentation to which all participants were invited.

The email system contributed to community cohesion as well because it became a communication tool used by participants to communicate across the full participant group. Regardless of the nature of participant involvement in the learning support system all were kept informed by the H R Development Officer and the group mentors about what was going on in the Project.

The different options that were taken up in Phase Three and the flexible conditions of involvement gave members different ways of participating in the community. The capacity for the community to accommodate different forms of participation and membership are indicators of a learning community (Wenger, 1998). The more interwoven community of the third phase also had the effect of decreasing the risk of participants unintentionally finding themselves isolated. By contrast, in the previous two phases, if a participant's support structure broke down or was impoverished in terms of learning potential, there was no capacity in the system for the learner to relocate himself or herself in alternative arrangements.

By the end of the third phase there was abundant evidence that the interactions between the participants were better producing the networks, norms, and levels of trust—the building blocks of social capital—necessary for the peer support system to meet its purpose. Participants were reporting a better understanding of the concepts and skills of the training workshops as a result of being able to share and reflect on experiences in the company of others they trusted. Mentors were reporting that the quality and quantity of the dialogue in the support groups had improved. Participants were sharing more of their learning experiences and engaging more with the stories of others.

There also developed a group of core members who were willing to take a very active role in the project to ensure its continuity. The motive for many of this group was the belief that the professional development project and the support system were very beneficial for the organisation. Working for what was perceived as the common good was evidence of another indicator of social capital which Leana and Van Buren III (1999) define as associability.

A comparison of Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2 draws attention to another significant difference between the beginning point and end point of the program's life. When the program was first introduced it was in many respects a foreign and indefinable element on the surface of the organisation. As time passed, the activity within the group and the connections formed between it and its outside world gave it more definition. This is represented by the oval circumscribing the learning community in the second diagram. The permeability of that boundary or membrane is explored in the next section.

6.4.3.2 Interfacing with external communities

The term "externality", as Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) use it, refers to the connection between the interactions of a learning community and the world external to it. In their studies, they found that the dimension of externality is related to the quality of the learning that goes on in a community because it impacts on both its identity and knowledge resources. The more closed the community is, the less likely it is that it develops new knowledge and identity resources, and conversely, the more permeable its boundaries are to the outside world the more likely it is that learning will occur.

If this case is an indication, the dimension of externality is critical in effective peer learning support systems. Figure 6.2 illustrates graphically the two most important, but by no means the only, external communities with which this learning community had relations. These were the organisation and the research team. While this was the situation when the program first started, it was only as the group developed into a community that it appreciated the import of these contexts to its practice.

In both cases the relationship between the emerging learning community and these other communities made the externality dimension complicated. In relation to the organisation, the peer learning support group was in reality a sub-community but of the kind that Schein (1993, 1995) defines as a "parallel learning set" or "practice field." This means its very raison d'être was entirely dependent on the quality and quantity of the new resources that flowed from it back into the organisation at large. As well as management's assessment of the program being a reminder of this unavoidable truth, how participants constructed their own identities in the program was heavily influenced by the relationship of the new learning community with the organisation. Almost all participants who maintained their membership did so only if they experienced or anticipated value that was realisable in their professional work as a staff member of the organisation.

Knowledge and identity resources also flowed into the learning community. This case showed that the learning community's capacity to produce new resources in terms of intellectual and social capital was heavily predicated on the knowledge and identity resources already circulating in the organisation and hence within its own membership. These included existing social arrangements and the identities participants had within those arrangements. They also included the organisation's values and existing norms of interaction. While some of these resources were useful, we saw in the previous sections that some, such as existing manger–subordinate relations were a liability that the peer learning support group had to learn to manage.

The permeability at the boundaries of this kind of learning community is best described therefore as a two-way differential permeability. The two-headed arrows in Figure 6.2 represent the two-way flow of knowledge resources and identity resources between the respective communities that became apparent as the peer learning support system evolved.

Negotiating the relationship of best fit between the new learning community and the organisation that hosted it formed part of the ongoing joint enterprise of its members. This task had to be done internally and also in association with external stakeholders such as supervisors and colleagues not involved in the Project. As the community developed, its practices became better aligned with the existing practices of the organisation. For example, the identity of mentor was discarded and replaced with that of learner and co-learner. Another example was the formation of a steering committee to help facilitate the accommodation of the Project within the organisation.

Most importantly, the process of negotiating the relationship of best fit was facilitated through new members joining the new community of practice. The mentors especially felt a responsibility to attract new members. Drawing new members from the organisation not only increased the population of the community, but it also produced learning opportunities for both existing members and the new members (Wenger, 1998). With each intake, the group gave itself the opportunity to recreate itself in a number of ways. Existing members shared with the new people the experience and expertise accumulated over the previous phase and in so doing, created a collective history. The new participants, on the other hand, added additional resources to the group that changed interactions often for the better. For example, it was two new mentors in Phase Two who showed that learning support groups could work. More generally, new members challenged and questioned existing practices and provided a "reality check" for existing members. This case study supports Wenger's (1998) thesis that members who are on the margins of a learning community because they are not full members, can enhance the learning capacity of a community if they are invited to do so.

The second significant external community for the learning community was the research team. At one level the two communities were co-dependent. The research team depended on the participant group for its common purpose and the peer learning support system depended on the negotiated contract between the research team and the organisation for its legitimacy.

In this sense, the community of practice owed the research team its genesis. Its existence was due to the mentoring program having been introduced as a component of the professional development project. This act contributed to its practice and identity. For example, some of the new knowledge resources injected into the knowledge pool of the participant group came from the workshops. Its purpose also had been pre-defined by the consultants in so much as it was to support and challenge co-participants in the execution of their action learning projects. The interconnectedness of the two communities was also demonstrated by the participants having to accommodate required activity from the research team such as data gathering.

As well as having constructive or benign influences, this relationship had some debilitating effects on the developing learning community. For example, the imposition of the mentor–mentee arrangement and its accompanying identities on the group caused it to struggle for longer than what may have been necessary. At a more fundamental level, the negative aspects of the relationship stemmed from the perceived differential in relevant expertise between the two groups. In the earlier phases of the program this was exacerbated by the lack of common membership between the two communities. As time passed, this changed. The participant group began to accumulate its own experiential knowledge and this increased confidence and agency. I also came to be a member of both communities, a process that I describe in Section 6.6 and is represented in Figure 6.2 as the two overlapping arcs. In so doing, the interface between the two communities became more transparent to both.

6.4.3.3 Continuity of experience

The third and last indicator of a learning community that I use here is the presence of a chronological continuity to its activity. Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) describe this separately as historicity and futuricity. Historicity is the collective and individual remembering of past experience and futuricity is the collective and individual envisioning of what is possible. Wenger (1998) draws on a similar notion to describe a way of belonging that a learning community offers its members that comes from imagining a future for their community and their membership in it. In this case a number of mechanisms contributed to creating a historicity/futuricity continuum. For such a dimension to develop however, time was the key prerequisite.

At the beginning of this section I identified time as having been a very important resource that the company gave participants to invest in this professional development project. If they so wished, almost all had the time to engage in the project in any number of ways such as mentor, group facilitator, presenter, mentee, lone learner, group learner, or any combination of these.

Time was also made available in another sense that engendered a sense of futuricity. When participants became involved in the Project they anticipated the option for long-term involvement. Even though the Project did end after eighteen months, it had a projected timeline of three years. In fact, the timeline was indefinite because it was intended that, after three years, those who had been mentors would be delivering the training workshops to the rest of the workforce. It was the perspective of longevity that gave meaning to the participants' and especially the mentors' efforts in the present to improve the peer learning support system from one phase to the next.

For the eighteen months that the program did last there were many kinds of mechanisms, practices, and interactions that brought to the present a "shared history of learning" (Wenger, 1998) and a vision of what might be. The regular mentor meetings, the action learning projects, and the very skills and concepts from the workshops fostered a climate for considered reflection. Celebration Days at the end of each phase when all participants gathered in the one room produced collective storying and imagining that influenced the shape of the program and participant's experiences in the subsequent phase. The phase arrangement created segments of time with formal beginnings and endings. This encouraged the re-invention of the peer learning support system and other elements of the Project in light of what had been learned. At an individual level, it gave participants the opportunity to "start again," but from a more experienced position with perhaps different action learning projects and different support arrangements.

Historicity was strengthened through the ongoing involvement of members in the Project thus maintaining a sense of continuity. With the exception of two people, all participants who stayed at the plant retained their memberships in one form or another. To their interactions they brought individual and collective histories of the enterprise which shaped the knowledge and identity resources they drew on. For example, through generating and sharing experiences with fellow members over a prolonged period of time, participants came to re-know one another as co-learners in the project.

In this section I have discussed the evolution of the mentoring program in terms of the participant group showing signs of becoming a community of practice and a learning community. I say "signs" because at eighteen months the peer learning support system was still in a very active stage of growth. Participants were continuing to add to the pool of experience required to develop the locally negotiated regime of competence (Wenger, 1998) that stabilises a community of practice. While management acknowledged that the peer learning support system was evolving, it was still important to assess its performance. In the next section I explore some of the major issues this study identified that impact on the assessment or evaluation of a peer learning support system.

6.5 Was the peer learning support program worth it?

As one might expect, opinions on the value of the peer learning support system depended on who was asked and when they were asked. Answers varied greatly from one phase to the next and from one participant to another. For the research team the program was worth it because it produced new learnings about the application of the traditional mentor–mentee dyad and about other peer learning support systems. For the participants, the answer depended on their own experience of the support system at the time.

The question of value probably proved most vexing for management. It became increasingly pressing when the organisation was cost cutting and the mentoring program was not progressing as envisaged. During the life of the program managers made tentative assessments about value. These were based on their personal experiences as mentors, but these perceptions became less valid when their direct participation decreased. Anecdotal evidence about personal change and changes in workplace practice was also used for making judgements as were participation rates in the various support arrangements.

For management, the issue of how to identify overall return to the organisation on the investment made in the mentoring program and, for that matter, in the professional development project as a whole, remained unresolved. While the research team had its own tests and list of indicators to measure change, management wanted to devise its own. In the eighteen months no satisfactory measurements were agreed upon even though a steering committee was formed in the third phase to establish acceptable criteria. It met only three times and the irrevocable decision to terminate the program made the task of establishing criteria meaningless.

In this section the approach I take to the question of value is to discuss what the study revealed about the factors implicated in assessing the value of a peer learning support program. I avoid making a determination on whether this program provided sufficient return on the investment for a number of reasons. Firstly, management did not make a determination. Secondly, the program was to have been a three-year program. Lastly, as I explained in Chapter One, circumstances made evaluation not my primary purpose in this thesis.

Here I discuss some of the more important factors that make assessing the worthwhileness of a peer learning support program of this kind difficult. I then suggest the kinds of data and data gathering methods that could help the management of an organisation arrive at a realistic valuation of a peer learning support program.

6.5.1 Factors confounding assessment of value

The most obvious way of ascertaining the value of a mentoring program or other peer learning support system to an organisation is to determine whether it is meeting its objectives. In this case the objectives of the three-year program were for mentors to support and challenge participants in their learning through the action learning projects; to develop mentoring expertise that could be used in their everyday interactions with colleagues; and to develop over the three years sufficient expertise in the content of the professional development project to deliver the training to the rest of the workforce. The ultimate objective was for the mentoring program to contribute to improving professional performance that in turn would improve the organisation's profit line.

The complex inter-relatedness of objectives in programs such as these makes evaluation difficult. In this case the specific three objectives were inter-dependent because performance on any one of the objectives was dependent on how well mentors were progressing on the other two. For example, if mentors were not engaged in viable mentoring relationships, then their mentoring expertise was not being developed. On the one hand, mentors' expertise in the actual content of the professional development affected the value of any mentoring relationships they may have had. On the other, the rate at which their expertise grew was a function of their mentoring relationships. Mentees' choice of topic for the action learning projects was just one of a number of factors that determined the mentor expertise called on and/or developed.

Evaluating the worth of a peer learning support program is made even more complex when its success depends on factors that are extrinsic to the program. A change in any one of those factors potentially impacts on the value participants and the organisation gain from the program. The earlier section that explored the reasons for the difficulties incurred in this case identified major external and internal factors that impacted on the value of the program. In this case, the action-learning project as the context for the mentoring proved to be one of the biggest determinants of the program's value.

In programs of the kind in this study where the program is a component of a wider professional development project aimed at introducing new skills and concepts into the organisation, an additional complication confronts any assessment of value. In more traditional applications of mentoring programs where mentors already possess the desired expertise to be shared with mentees, the value of the skills and concepts themselves is a given. In this case, the new knowledge did not have that same "given" status for management. Its value to positively impact on professional performance was reportedly true, but management had no direct experience of it. Furthermore, it was knowledge that was not quantifiable in the same way as other more familiar kinds of knowledges. How skills and associated concepts in reflection and creative thinking can be applied to developing one's own personal practical knowledge and that of others was more difficult to identify than, say, how the knowledge of a financial system impacts on an administrator's performance in doing monthly accounts. Any uncertainty management felt about the value of the skills and concepts presented at the workshop therefore influenced the perceived value of the mentoring program introduced to support the development of that knowledge.

The final factor that I wish to explore here that influences the assessment of value is the time-frame required to find a peer learning support system that is "of best fit" with the organisation. Finding a system "of best fit" for the purposes of introducing new knowledge and skills into an organisation in ways that are also new requires time. As this case showed, effective dynamics within the system need to be developed and, as importantly, a new set of dynamics between it and its host organisation also needs to be established. Because a peer learning support program is a social intervention it displaces to varying degrees existing configurations of relationships and networks in the organisation. A program of "best fit" requires finding the appropriate level of resistance from its host organisation. Too much resistance will cause the program to wither and no resistance is an indication that the program may not be generating new learnings. In this case over twelve months were required to develop a support system that seemed to have at least some of the appropriate dimensions or elements. The issue here for management is determining the length of "teething" time that is acceptable to them and the sort of criteria that are appropriate for measuring value during that time.

6.5.2 Ascertaining the value of a peer learning support system

The factors I have explored in this section so far show that evaluating peer support programs of the kind in this study makes the choice of appropriate data, how to collect that data, and how to interpret them a complex one. Participation rates for example is one useful way of determining whether a peer support program is effective, but it has limitations. Participation alone does not indicate that the program is meeting its objectives because it does not give any indication of the kinds of interactions that occur or the kinds of value that participants find in them. While participation is necessary it is not sufficient proof that the peer support system is meeting its objectives. What's more, participation rates need not be entirely determined by the mentoring program itself. In this case factors external to the program were adversely affecting participation and therefore these data were not a true indication of the program's potential value.

Satisfaction surveys or the one-off interview, while useful, are also fraught with problems. As I will explain later in this chapter, the study showed that participants can be reluctant to express their honest opinions about a program. These methods of generating data also have another limitation. They either tend to not invite the respondent to identify specific learnings made as a result of their interaction in a mentoring program or, if they do, participants often have difficulty in identifying them. On many occasions when interviewing participants I found that, without facilitative questioning on my part, they were unable to identify changes within their own practice. I also found that where they may not have been able to identify change, their co-members in a learning support group were able to do so. These findings, that were incidental to the main purpose of interviews, indicate that there are pools of relevant data that risk not being tapped either formally or informally when assessing a program.

Another pool of data that this study suggests is important to establishing the value of a peer learning support system is information about the social capital it is building. In Chapter Three I argued that it was evident from the literature that the value of a mentoring program to an organisation needs to be considered in terms of the changes it brings to the social capital of the organisation as much as to its human capital. Judging the value of a program in terms of its contribution to the knowledge and skill resources of an organisation underestimates its value. This study showed that the peer learning support system generated new social capital within the community of participants in the form of new configurations of networks, new norms, new information channels, and levels of trust.

There was also evidence that the peer learning support system was generating changes in the wider community of the organisation in terms of the kinds of interactions occurring. Small groups of participants scattered throughout the plant were meeting in crib rooms with co-workers over lunch and talking about the concepts from the professional development project. Mentors reported that they had noticed meetings conducted in some sections of the plant change for the better as a result of mentors learning better communicative practices at their own meetings. The manager of one department chose his action learning project to be about learning to delegate more responsibility and authority to his coordinators. In his case this meant learning to trust his people more. Over time he did learn to delegate and as a result, the daily shopfloor meetings ran more smoothly and took less time than they had previously.

While these changes in social capital are not evidence that professional practice had improved sufficiently to have impacted on the organisation's productivity, they are important to include as data in an assessment of value for two reasons. Firstly they are indicators that learning is occurring. They are signs that the peer support group is developing into a learning community and they can also be signs that some of the change is seeping into the mainstream organisation. Secondly the new social capital produced can be of value for purposes other than those directly related to the Project. For example, staff from the two production sites of the Tank House and the Casting House reported valuing the opportunity to interact in the ALE support groups and believed that such interaction could lead to the breaking down of boundaries between the two subcultures.

This case study highlighted the importance of multiple sources of data in making a realistic assessment of value. It showed the importance of identifying indicators of learning that pre-date actual improvement in professional performance which, for some participants, may take lengthy periods of time. Those indicators include changes in social capital within the peer support system and within the organisation.

Ways in which data are accessed also require careful consideration. Formal data collection methods such as satisfaction questionnaires or one-off interviews have limitations. This case showed the potential of discussion groups and multiple facilitative interviews in generating more comprehensive data. Informal methods such as direct observation or through conversation are also very important ways of data gathering, but are dependent on managers' having good and sufficiently close relationships with their reportees.

The processes of developing effective ways of ascertaining the value of a peer learning support system and of finding ways that maximise its value to the organisation should be ongoing and mutually defining processes. The challenge for management is to establish formal and informal ways of ascertaining the value of a program that are non-intrusive, non-threatening, comprehensive, and cognisant of how adults learn in the workplace and of the factors that impact on that learning.

6.6 Why did my participation change?

The fourth and last question pertaining to the case itself was: Why did my participation as researcher change and with what results? As well as being the story of how the mentoring program evolved, this thesis was also the story of my changing participation in the program. The story I told in Chapter Five showed that in a number of different ways, participants and I mutually constructed experiences. The story also showed that some of those experiences influenced individual change and even how the program evolved.

A particularly significant example described in Act Three was the decision agreed to by us all—and approved by the consultants—to have me facilitate the fortnightly meetings of the group mentors. These meetings which included short training sessions were a precondition participants requested before accepting their role as group mentors. The decision to facilitate at the group mentor meetings was personally significant in my own journey toward learning about the practice of collaborative research of this kind. It was the first time I actually felt at ease with a decision to deliberately intervene in the process. My willingness to help the participants wanting to be group mentors brought to a hiatus—but certainly not to an end—the angst I had been feeling since the very beginning of the program concerning how my presence in the field was impacting on the results. With this event my identity as researcher melded into that of co-participant in an explicit and public way.

While Chapter Five told of those experiences in narrative form, this section explains my changing participation from a theoretical perspective. To interpret my changing identity and changing relationships with the participants and what this meant for the program, I draw on the notion of "communities of practice" that I have already used in this chapter to help describe how the mentor group evolved. By considering the pertinent communities of practice of which I was a member and those of which I was not, and by considering the nature of those memberships, I explore retrospectively possible explanations for my changing participation in the project at the refinery.

Particularly relevant is Wenger's social theory of identity formation. Wenger explains that "identity is not merely a category, a personality trait, a role, or a label: it is more fundamentally an experience that involves both participation and reification" within communities of practice (1998, p. 163). He explains that it's how we reconcile our participation in the various communities of practice to which we belong or have belonged that contributes to the construction of our identity.

The lens of "researcher identity" allows for a more encompassing and holistic description of researcher practice than that of the more commonly used lens of "researcher role." Whereas the notion of role suggests that a researcher enters a field scripted and "in role," the notion of "identity" legitimises those aspects of lived social experience that are unscripted, developmental, and negotiated. In this section I reflect on my experience as the on-site researcher from the perspective of my dual evolving membership in two communities of practice—the research team and the participant group.

6.6.1 Two interconnected communities of practice

The research team was clearly one significant community of practice to which I belonged and with experience, I came to realise that the second was in fact the participant group. Prior to this project I had been a member of other communities of practice including a financial planning firm for six years and, before that, the teaching staff of high schools. While this project was in progress I was also a member of other communities. Although those experiences no doubt helped shape the Jo Balatti of that time, I leave them out of this discussion to focus primarily on the two main ones of which I was a member during the study—the research team and the participant group.

Before discussing my membership of either community, the relationship that the communities had with each other needs some elaboration because in many ways, it predicated the nature of my memberships and the dilemmas I encountered. In a fundamental way these two communities were co-dependent. The research team would not have formed and continued to exist if the participant group had not existed, and vice-versa. In fact, the research team of six—three Chief Investigators, one Research Fellow and two Research Officers—had not worked as a group prior to this project and in the beginning not all the members even knew one another. Similarly, the participant group would not have formed had the research project not taken place in the refinery.

For the communities of practice there were two major areas for negotiation and reconciliation. The first had to do with maintaining fidelity to the company's and the research team's objectives. The second had to do with managing the different kinds of risk involved in such a collaboration.

The co-dependency was founded on a jointly funded collaboration aimed at meeting the inter-related goals of the research team and the organisation in which the participant group was located. For management, the expectation was that the intervention would produce improved professional performance. For the research team, the goal was to research the application of a model of change in the workplace by implementing an intervention and monitoring the results. While the goals of the research team and the organisation may have been compatible, they were not identical. One fundamental difference concerned the value that different outcomes would have for the stakeholders. For the researchers, any outcome would have had research value, but for the organisation, only positive outcomes would have had value.

Furthermore, the risk factor associated with the project was different for the two communities. For the organisation, this intervention like most interventions incurred a monetary cost. This comprised consultancy fees, a contribution to research costs such as transcriptions, and my salary. The investment also included a substantial cost in employee paid time to participate in the project. The risk however went beyond the risk of investment return. It also included the risk of the project having a negative impact on the dynamics of the organisation while it was in progress and even after its completion.

For the research team, the risks were of another kind. Levin (1993) notes that collaborative research runs the risk of not being valued by the academic community because it does not conform to the research model of a controlled environment. Our research was subject to the vagaries of organisational life and to the willingness of the organisation to accommodate research protocols and practices that were not part of their normal repertoire.

Within this arrangement there was also what Schein (1987, p. 33) calls a "psychological contract" by which he means "the unspoken expectations that operate between the parties and that define what behaviour is considered normal or abnormal, what behaviour is defined as good or bad, and what defines success or failure in the relationship." As interactions and shared experience accumulated between the two communities the psychological contract developed and became better understood by both.

An important element in the psychological contract, especially as it pertained to meeting the project's objectives and to minimising risk for both parties, was the issue of expertise. The very premise on which collaborative research is based is that both researchers and participants are producers of knowledge that is valued by the research community and the workplace. In this study the knowledge generated by the participants has been described as personal practical knowledge. For the researchers, the personal practical knowledge generated by the participants in experiencing and changing the mentoring program was valuable in understanding how mentoring programs evolve. From the organisation's perspective, the researchers, in particular, the consultants, were expected to have knowledge that was useful to the organisation.

In terms of expertise building and sharing, the psychological contract in collaborative research requires that all parties acknowledge that group members and researchers alike are learners and experts, but in different ways. Although this may sound simple, how expertise is identified, developed, and exchanged can be fraught with tension.

One such tension with its resolution was noted earlier in this chapter and concerned participants' developing confidence in their own experiential knowledge of the mentoring program. As they developed personal practical knowledge about mentoring in their unique context, their expectation that solutions to problems would be provided through external sources diminished.

There were other tensions with respect to the organisation's expectations of the consultants' expertise. One manager, for example, who was frustrated by the apparent lack of results, heavily attributed blame to the consultants because they, afterall, were the "experts." This was despite the understanding that the project was a research project which, by definition, meant that the best peer support system for this kind of professional development program had not yet been identified. It was also despite acknowledging that the intent of the research was for the participants to take charge of the mentoring program and develop it to best suit their needs. The manager's criticisms pointed to the difficulties that consultants who profess to a field of expertise face when interventions do not go as expected.

Another difficulty facing consultants is the way in which they share their expertise with the participant community, especially the key stakeholders. Such expertise includes the theoretical grounds for their intervention. In this case, it seemed that the explanations provided by the consultants had not been sufficient for key participants who had to "maintain the faith" when little progress was apparently being made. In a reflection at the end of the eighteen months, the project coordinator, who was by profession a psychologist, expressed regret at not having had a more complete understanding of the consultants' rationale for the Project from the outset:

> The coordinator really needs that bigger and more detailed picture at the start and—not so much as being taken into their confidence—but knowing what is going on. So unless you are given that knowledge, then yeah, you are just floundering the same as everybody else. *(Long pause.)*
>
> I was going to say if I had known more about the rationale then I may have been able to be more alert to the danger signals. But, then again, we may have still headed down exactly as it has panned out today.

The purpose of this brief overview has been to show how the two communities of practice were connected. Because I was the on-site research officer I was a member of both communities. In some respects I was located at the intersection of these two communities where issues concerning expertise, risk management, and objectives were negotiated and reconciled.

6.6.2 On being a member of the research team

The research team was my primary community of practice. A cursory overview of research literature shows that the rhetoric used by members of the general research community tends to convey a sense of expertise. The author of the research paper or monograph often uses such rhetoric to create the impression to peers and to outsiders that she is expert in the field in which she is doing research and is also expert in the business of doing research—regardless of experience. This rhetoric produces a "researcher-expert" association reified in the notion of "researcher role" which has the effect of disembodying the researcher from her lived experience.

To engage in this rhetoric becomes difficult if not impossible when the notion of researcher identity rather than that of researcher role is used to interpret the researcher's participation in the research process. This is because identity is related not only to one's membership of the salient communities of practice but also to the nature of that membership.

Although my attention in this section is mainly on the changing nature of my membership in the participant group, the kind of membership I had in the research team and within the research community more generally is also extremely important to understanding my interactions with the participants in the field. The knowledge and identity resources (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000) that I brought to those interactions are at least partly determined by these research related memberships.

At the beginning of the project I had in many ways what Lave and Wenger (1991) call a "peripheral membership" in the research team. When I joined the research team of six I knew none of the other members and I had had only three years experience in research. None of this previous experience had been in a large team of this kind, in collaboration with industry, or had required prolonged relationships with participants. The research I had done was almost all qualititative and nonpositivist which, in itself, placed me in a different interpretive community from the Chief Investigators of the project. Furthermore, my knowledge of mentoring was limited. I was familiar with the literature and had personal experience of informal mentoring, but I had no direct experience of formal mentoring as a participant, trainer, or researcher.

Over the eighteen-month period, ongoing interaction through meetings and emails with my immediate research community, through reading the literature, and through participating at conferences allowed me to develop a fuller membership of the research community. I became more knowledgeable about mentoring, about the theory underpinning the objectives of the professional development project overall, and about the kind of research perspective I wished to pursue. My changing membership in these communities contributed to my changing engagement in the participant group.

6.6.3 On being a member of the participant group

Because I was located in the organisation in which the mentoring program was taking place, the possibility for me to become a member of the participant community of practice was present from the start. In the beginning however, I did not see myself as a member of the participant group at all even though I attended the weekly mentor meetings, had regular informal chats with most other participants, and worked for half the week on-site. My intention was to be the remote observer, a position that I thought was appropriate for the "researcher," and which the mentors humoured. It also became a position that became increasingly difficult to maintain for several reasons.

From the participants' perspective, it proved difficult for them to see me merely as an extension of my tape recorder. While willing to answer my questions, participants also expected answers to some of their own. They would ask me questions about the program, seek advice on aspects of their individual ALEs, and express their concerns to which they wanted reactions. As the company project coordinator explained to me at the end of the eighteen month period: "Once you are in an organisation, people see you as being part of the process, and part of the company, not part of the research team."

From my perspective, remaining at arm's length became increasingly difficult especially toward the end of the first twelve months for other reasons as well. First and foremost I felt a sense of responsibility for an intervention that had been introduced by my research team and with which the participants were having difficulties.

The second set of reasons had to do with the participants evolving from a "group" to a community of common purpose to a community of practice and where I could make a worthwhile contribution. Expertise in group facilitation and learning was one knowledge resource I could bring to the community that was much needed for it to achieve its common purpose.

By the end of the project I was a member of the community, but different from other members. The major source of differences stemmed from the memberships we held in other communities. While the organisation itself and its various departments were the communities to which the participants belonged, my membership of the research team determined the nature of my membership.

6.6.4 On reconciling dual membership

Wenger (1998) stresses that one's identity is not simply the sum of one's memberships of various communities of practice. Rather, at any given time, one's identity is shaped through how we reconcile the various memberships we have.

In this case of collaborative research reconciling my dual membership was an ongoing process and took a number of forms. In the community of practice at the refinery, reconciliation concerned the participants' expectations of my involvement, the consultants' expectations, and ultimately what my experience indicated how I should participate.

From the very beginning, I was preoccupied with how my presence and my interactions with the group would influence the program. My task, as originally described by the consultants to the participants, was to observe, collect data, and to help. The kinds of help that participants could ask for were not made explicit. This caused me some concern because the consultants had also urged that I be, as much as possible, an observer only. Consequently I began my job as the on-site researcher, a position I had never experienced before, with the belief that my goal was to be, as much as it was humanly possible, a fly on the wall.

It became clear very early that even the position of remote observer was nonetheless a position that resulted in particular kinds of interactions and not others. The two rounds of participant interviews in Phase One illustrated how this position did in fact affect the data and in adverse ways at that.

In comparing the data from the first round of interviews with the second, I noted a strong change in the participants' opinions about their mentoring arrangements. In the first round participants had indicated that on the whole, they were pleased with their mentoring arrangements and with the progress they were making with their ALEs. The second round of interviews showed a decided shift to strong dissatisfaction with both the mentoring arrangements and the ALE project format. When I asked about the change, many participants said that there had, in reality, been no change. They explained that they had hesitated in being more forthcoming in the earlier interviews because they thought that I was evaluating their own personal performance and that of their colleagues. They were also not certain how this might impact on other aspects of their existence at work. Consequently they had chosen to be reticent about their experience. They went on to explain that later in the program, they had felt more free to be open about their opinions because they realised that I was not evaluating them. Their earlier perception had no doubt been supported by my behaviour at meetings, where I was taking notes, taping dialogue—and being silent.

The activity of interviewing proved to be an important site for reconciling my dual memberships in a number of ways. Because I was a researcher, the interview was one of the primary ways of collecting data for analysis and therefore critical to the functioning of the research team. The interactions associated with the interview however occurred within the community of practice that was the mentoring program. Consequently the interview process was absorbed into the rest of the activity associated with the program and assumed meanings for the participants that were different from those the research community anticipated or perhaps even would have preferred. As well as the interview being a source of learning for the researcher, it had become a learning opportunity for the participants. The interview process itself therefore had become a vehicle for change.

When I realised that for many participants the research tool of interviewing had in fact become an opportunity for reflection and learning, I chose to deliberately develop its capacity to promote change. The whiteboard in my office quickly became a tool that was often used by either one of us to help explain ourselves. I became more willing to disclose my experience or perceptions when invited. As I began to appreciate the power of questioning in this context, the most obvious change occurred in the way I questioned. This is a power that Schein (1987, p. 64) identifies in both consultancy work and in research when he states:

> One of the most powerful tools consultants have for influencing the client's thinking is the kinds of questions they ask, because those questions can direct the client's thinking into specific areas and even suggest specific solutions or answers....The same is true for researchers.

The process of reconciling my dual memberships also included a brokering function. This was because the research team and the participant group were two communities of practice that were interconnected and in fact, co-dependent. The brokering took a number of forms that again are confronting to the image of the researcher as being non-interventionist. Wenger (1998, p. 109) explains that brokering

> involves processes of translation, coordination, and alignment between perspectives. It requires enough legitimacy to influence the development of a practice, mobilise attention, and address conflicting interests. It also requires the ability to link practices by facilitating transactions between them, and to cause learning by introducing into a practice elements of another.

Brokering occurred in both communities and in the participant community of practice, opportunities arose in interviews, meetings, and in casual interaction. One area of brokering concerned correcting misinformation about the research project design and providing clarifications about the project's purpose. An example was with a manager who joined the program in the second phase as a mentor. In an interview he expressed his frustration with the mentor group meetings which he considered ineffectual and a waste of organisational resources. In his view, the fault lay with the consultants whom he felt had been responsible for implementing the weekly meetings. The managers had not introduced the weekly mentor meetings:

Manager: We haven't been given anything, we haven't been charged with anything, and we're wondering around trying to find out what it is that we've been charged with and I think the people who put this together were negligent in not making that clear to people. Why spend so much time wandering around trying to confirm what it is that we're about, when we were put there by somebody for some purpose?

Jo: You weren't put there. The mentors in the first group decided to have a mentor meeting once a week and it was decided to continue this in Phase Two.

Manager: Right, go on.

Jo: The mentor group meetings were not imposed on you by the consultants. You guys are driving this and Group One opted for the weekly meetings.

Manager: O.K. because I wasn't in Group One I guess I am somewhat lost and amazed as to how it came about.

Jo: Well that's how it came about.

Manager: Yeah, I understand now.

The conversation continued with a discussion of the importance to the research project of participant personal practical knowledge in developing effective peer supported learning arrangements. Although the manager was incorrect about the way the mentor meetings originated, his criticism was nevertheless important because it touched on the "psychological contract" between the two communities referred to earlier in this section. In this instance, the manager's understanding of the contract differed from that of the consultants. From the manager's perspective, the external experts had a responsibility to direct the development of the program in a more active manner than they had been doing. From the consultants' perspective, the importance of the project lay in the participants developing their own expertise.

At another level, brokering occurred in an even more interventionist way. This was especially so in the second half of the program when the company coordinator of the project and I began working together. By then, Brian and I were having lengthy discussions about the concepts underpinning the project, mentoring, and the ways in which the program was developing or could develop. I would share the findings in the literature I had been reading and he would do likewise. In my final interview with Brian I asked about the value of having ongoing interaction with a member of the research team to which he replied:

> I think it is essential, invaluable. If you weren't here to discuss this with me, then it would have been just Jim and John having an injection [the training workshops] and away they'd go leaving us to our own devices. But having the option of being able to say, "Hey what's all this about?" when we struck troubles or for me to improve my knowledge of what's going on and just talk about it has been good. I was just thinking how much more powerful it could have been if we were able to do that right from the start.

Earlier in the program, our relationship had been courteous but somewhat distant. This was partly due to my new membership of the research team and of the participant group. It was also because of my concern that such interaction would, in some way, compromise the research.

This became a secondary consideration toward the end of the second phase when workplace uncertainties were adversely affecting participants' and especially the managers' interest in the mentoring program. Its premature demise through lack of direction had become a real possibility. (This was before knowing that the company would terminate it before the commencement of Phase Four for reasons unrelated to the Project itself.) Both the coordinator and I concluded that if the program was to survive the period of confusion and uncertainty, then more proactive involvement was required from both of us.

This situation produced a dilemma for me, albeit a short-lived one, regarding my involvement. The dilemma stemmed from my memberships in the mentoring community and in the research community.

On the one hand, I was very conscious that my membership of this community was different from that of the other members and that the success of this program depended on their ownership of it. Any interventionist activity on my part potentially threatened that ownership. On the other, a developing set of circumstances seemed to indicate that the group required resources that it did not have but which I could help provide especially through active collaboration with the company coordinator of the project.

As Wenger states, reconciling memberships need not mean a comfortable or satisfactory reconciliation. The dilemma I have just discussed was one example where the overlapping, but nevertheless different sets of values and practices of the two communities required reconciling. The resolution of this dilemma signalled a milestone in my own journey toward reconciling my understanding of the requirements of research with my understanding of the reciprocity, responsibility, and sense of belonging that community membership produces.

In this section, I have used the notion of reconciling my dual memberships in the research community of practice and the mentoring community of practice to explain my changing identity as researcher. In this research project, reconciliation involved learning more about being a member of one community by virtue of being a member of the other. My membership of the participant group furthered my understanding of what it means to be a researcher in collaborative research of this kind. My other membership of the research community helped me contribute to the participant group in ways that were meaningful to those participants in their pursuit of improved professional practice.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter drew from the narrative the four threads or themes most relevant to understanding the case. These themes were posed in the form of four questions, namely:

Why did the peer learning support system have so many problems?

Why did it evolve in the way it did?

Was the peer learning support system worth it?

Why did my participation as researcher change in the program?

Exploration of the first question led to the conclusion that much of the difficulty was attributable to the inappropriateness of the mentor–mentee dyad as a learning support arrangement in this context. Notwithstanding the problems, a set of existing preconditions gave the mentoring program the opportunity to evolve. In answer to the second question, this evolution was described in terms of the participant group becoming a community of practice that demonstrated features of a learning community. One of the signs that indicated developing community cohesion and learning was the transformation of the program's structure. The initial, wheel-shaped arrangement of eight relatively isolated triads with the mentor group at the hub evolved in to a diversified and flexible interrelated set of support arrangements. This study showed that social arrangements, social capital, and learning co-evolved.

Although the third question invited a simple "yes" or "no" answer, neither management nor I came to a conclusion. In this chapter I identified the factors that complicated making such an evaluation.

The fourth question dealt with explaining why my participation as the on-site researcher changed during the time of the fieldwork. Rather than speaking in terms of the researcher's role, I discussed this question from the perspective of my changing membership of the research team and of the participant group which were the two communities of practice to which I belonged.

The thesis so far has explored these themes through narrative, through comparing this case with other mentoring programs, and through social theories of learning. In so doing, the study has furthered our knowledge of mentoring programs, of peer learning support systems more generally, and of collaborative research with organisations. In the next and final chapter I conclude with identifying the contributions that the research has made in these areas.

Chapter Seven

The point to the story

"You can only go so far by yourself.
You then need to become a social animal to move on.
I am probably at the stage where I have done all I can alone.
Now I need to jump on the bus with other people.
And my problem there will be—
Who are the other people?"

Ted, a 50 year-old engineer, reflecting on how he has been learning (to be a better reflective practitioner)

7.1 Introduction

With the words above Ted encapsulates the story of his eighteen-month long personal learning journey and makes his point. In the first two phases Ted is a mentee who experiences little or no satisfaction with his mentoring experiences. He quickly disengages and pursues his learning mainly alone with the help of books and the occasional attendance at a learning support group. In the third phase he chooses not to enter any mentoring arrangement at all. After going it solo for as long as possible he realises that his learning can only progress in the company of others. For me, the most poignant moment in Ted's reflection is when that realisation has him speculate on the presence of co-learners in his workplace. This leads to asking himself how he might reach out to them. It is in anticipation of the very question that Ted poses that mentoring programs are implemented in workplaces, but, as this case study showed, they do not always provide a satisfactory answer.

In a sense, Ted's story is a cameo of the bigger narrative that is this thesis. The parallels are many. Both are about a journey of experience and of learning through experience. Trial and error, change, reflection on change, and then more change constitute the storyline of the two narratives. Both underscore the interconnections between relationships and learning and especially the importance of belonging to community to personal growth. Ultimately, Ted's story is a reminder that all adults produce their own unique learning narratives in their own time, at their own pace, and in their own way (Burns, 1995; Candy, 1991; Confessore & Confessore, 1992). This is a reality that organised workplace professional development initiatives cannot avoid, but one that, more often than not, is accommodated unsatisfactorily.

Just as Ted tells his story to make a point, so too, do I. Labov (1972), who identified and described that element of narrative by which the narrator conveys her point, explains that for a story to be worth telling, it must make a point that is worth reporting. Should a narrator be met with the question of "So what?" at the end of the narrative event (Bauman, 1986), she can only conclude that the story had been pointless—at least for that listener or reader.

How the same story can make different points to different audiences has been explored by social scientists such as Labov (1972) and narratologists such as Chambers (1984). Their conclusion is that the "point" of a story is shaped by the contexts in which the story is written and read and thus is mutually constructed by the narrator and the reader, listener or viewer. Bauman's (1986) model of narrative production which I adopted to organise the construction of this thesis (see Chapter Two) would support this theory. In his model the three elements of oral narrative production—the narrated event, the narrative text, and the narrative event—are mutually constituting. The "point" of a story therefore can be considered as the consummation of that interrelationship.

In this thesis, Chapter Four and especially the narrative stage play in Chapter Five deliberately invited different interpretations of what happened in this peer learning support program and why it happened. It is likely that the narrative would make a different point to an audience of consultants working in the area of professional development, to researchers, or to the participants themselves. It could also differ from one individual to the next.

In this narrative production however, the intended audience is the research community and thus the answer to the question of "So what?" needs to be couched in terms of the contribution that this narrative has made to knowledge. With Chapter Six I began crystallising what that contribution might be by reframing the narrative using existing theories about mentoring and learning. In this last chapter I make explicit the point I wish this narrative to make by reflecting on the insights that it provides to the following questions:

1. What did this case study contribute to our understanding of formal mentoring?
2. What did this case study contribute to our understanding of other formal peer support learning structures?
3. What contribution did this study make to our understanding of collaborative research?

Before exploring these questions and the implications that the answers might have for practice and further research, I begin with a synopsis of the case followed by a discussion of the limitations of this thesis to its study.

7.2 The case in summary

The subject of this study was an eighteen-month long mentoring program intended to support the learning of participants in a professional development initiative aimed at improving creative thinking and reflection. Approximately fifty professional staff members volunteered to participate in the program as mentors or mentees.

Like most other programs, this program had protocols for selecting mentors and matching them with mentees. As well, mentors were trained in skills to help them support and challenge their mentees. The specific context in which the mentoring was to take place was the individual action learning projects that mentees designed to provide a focus for learning new ways of thinking and going about their work. The mentor's task was to help their mentees "grow" by encouraging them to learn about their thinking and practice via the individual projects.

Unlike most other programs, in this mentoring program the mentors met regularly as a group. In addition, the program design allowed for ongoing modification. These two factors were critical in providing the stimulus and the space for the mentoring program to develop and for participants to voice their struggle with the notions of mentoring they were bringing to this new workplace experience.

From the very beginning, the mentoring arrangements implemented and even the term "mentor" met with resistance. Most mentors and mentees felt uncomfortable with how the terms mentor and mentee positioned them in the relationship. Changes to the structure of the action learning projects and to the matching process did not make a significant difference to participants' dissatisfaction with the mentor–mentee arrangement. For as long as the mentor–mentee relationship formed the basis of the mentoring program, it proved unsuccessful as a peer learning support mechanism. Very few mentoring relationships became established and most of those did not last beyond a few weeks.

Despite this resistance and lack of success, the mentors as a group developed other ways of helping one another learn. The most successful of all arrangements were loosely interconnected learning support groups of four to six members. These groups were facilitated by group mentors who received ongoing training and support. Each group had a core membership and a peripheral membership. More participants became engaged in the groups than in mentoring dyads or triads and most of these reported benefit in attending the group meetings.

While the participants found the formal mentor–mentee dyad unacceptable, they valued a "mentoring style" of interaction. In this case a mentoring style came to mean one characterised by effective listening and facilitative questioning in an environment where there was sufficient trust for the learner to risk voicing assumptions and making errors.

Notwithstanding the extensive literature on the factors that affect the success of a mentoring program in a workplace, other factors emerged from this study that have not previously been given due consideration. This case study revealed that there are some contexts that are incompatible with the notion of mentoring for reasons to do with characteristics intrinsic to a mentoring relationship, with the increasingly contrived nature of mentoring programs, and with the changing nature of the workplace. In this case study, group based peer learning support systems showed more potential for producing effective learning relationships than the traditional mentor–mentee dyad.

7.3 Limitations of the study

This study has all the limitations of a study based on a single case. These limitations are arguably further exacerbated by the choice of a case that was significantly different from most mentoring programs in terms of its aims and how it was operationalised. It was also a case where the researcher was a participant of the mentoring program and the learning community into which it evolved. Despite its uniqueness, this case has enough similarities with other mentoring programs to permit its classification as one. As importantly, the factors contributing to its uniqueness presented conditions that tested the capacity of formal mentoring to facilitate learning. It is the responses to these conditions that form the basis for this study's contribution to the field of facilitated mentoring and to peer learning support systems more generally.

A second set of limitations to the study was unforseen. When the mentoring program began there was no indication that the organisation would soon be experiencing enormous upheaval and stress. These factors undoubtedly affected how the program evolved which in itself makes the case even more particular. The most severe impact that the organisational restructuring had on the professional development project of which the mentoring program was a part was to reduce its intended three-year duration to half that time. Within months of its termination, approximately two-thirds of the participants were relocated to other companies or made redundant. This included the two key champions of the program, the Acting General Manager and the H R Development Officer. Management's decision to withdraw from the collaboration and the difficulties that the program encountered in its earlier stages meant that the original research scope and questions had to be revised. Clearly to document the evolution of the program over three years and to study its impact on the organisation as a whole would have produced a more longitudinal study. The revisions to the research design necessitated by these events resulted in a more detailed analysis of how and why the program evolved in the early stages.

A third set of limitations concerns the methodology. As was explained in Chapter Two, the narrative in this thesis has minimal character representation for reasons to do with confidentiality and the research design. As well as producing an impoverished narrative the absence of characterisation glosses over aspects of participants' personal narratives that no doubt were impacting on their mentoring experience and possibly on the program itself.

There are also limitations associated with the theoretical lenses I used to interpret how the program evolved. Choosing particular theories about learning instead of, say, theories on group dynamics to interpret the transformation of the participant group into a community of practice makes meaning of certain aspects of the experience at the expense of others.

7.4 Contribution to our understanding of facilitated mentoring

Participant interpretations of what constitutes a mentoring relationship indicate that contexts shape constructions of mentoring. The difficulties encountered in this program also suggest that there are contexts in which formal dyad based mentoring programs are not the most appropriate strategy for peer supported learning.

7.4.1 Multiple constructions of the mentoring relationship

The need to clarify the mentoring role has been identified repeatedly in the literature as critical to the success of any mentoring program. Role refers to the rights and obligations that mentors and mentees can expect to fulfil or have met in the program. In this case study, the construct of role was an oversimplification of the dynamics that connected mentors with mentees. It was the mentoring *relationship* rather than the mentoring *role* that better crystallised the main issues at the heart of the difficulties encountered by the participants. Some of these issues concerned the different interpretations participants had of what constitutes a mentoring relationship. Other issues pointed to the incompatibility of the specific context of the mentoring program with elements common to most mentoring relationships. By "specific context" I mean the purpose of the program, how it was implemented, the arena in which the mentoring was to take place, and the larger work environment in which the relationships were meant to develop.

The multiple notions of mentoring brought to the program seem to fall into four different categories that derive from different kinds of contexts. These categories are also evident in the literature on mentoring reviewed in Chapter Three. Figure 7.1 depicts these categories as overlapping rectangles with each rectangle representing a cluster of mentoring constructions that share some key characteristics. The overlap between categories represents those characteristics that the different categories potentially have in common. While the diagram indicates the chronological progression from the first to the fourth categories it is important to note that all four categories of mentoring constructions co-exist at this time in history, albeit uncomfortably.

The first category comprises the idealised representations of the mentor–mentee relationship found in literature and film. These are the mythologised notions that have the mentor acquire an almost superhuman or demigod status in a relationship where the mentee is protected, nurtured, and developed. This category of mentoring constructs can be described as the root stock from which other interpretations of mentoring relationships have evolved and mutated or, at the very least, have drawn on for inspiration or definition.

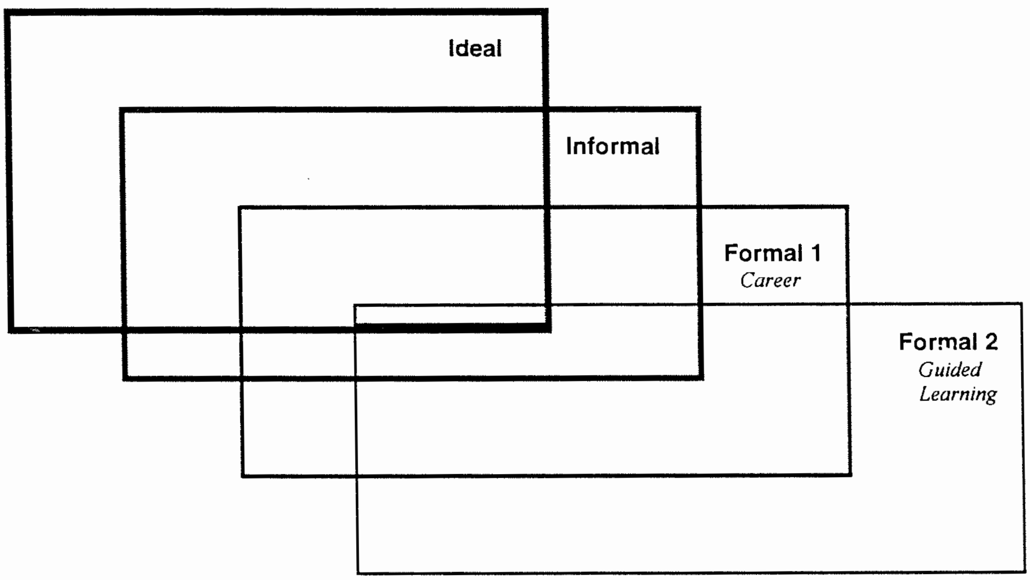

Figure 7.1. Contexts and constructions of mentoring

The second category consists of the interpretations that derive from experiences of informal mentoring. These are relationships that occur "naturally" in one's personal or professional life and that have at least some of the characteristics of the ideal mentoring relationship. They are unplanned and unstructured with the participants tending not to refer to them as mentoring relationships while the relationships are still active. It is often only with hindsight that they would describe themselves as having been a mentor or mentee. These are the kinds of relationships that Levinson called in his study a "form of love relationship" (1978, p. 100) and in which the mentors are "creations of our imaginations, designed to fill a psychic space somewhere between lover and parent"(Daloz, 1986, p. 17).

The third and fourth categories are constructions found in the experience of formal mentoring relationships. Here mentoring relationships are organised, managed, and monitored and are usually in the workplace. It is useful to distinguish here between those formal programs that are primarily designed for career advancement and those where mentoring is used as a strategy for guided learning in professional development programs.

As well as being chronologically more recent than the third category, programs in the fourth category have created a more diversified and arguably a more contrived range of contexts in which formal mentoring has been attempted.

Where in the third category the mentoring relationship is generally designed to be subsumed into the existing manager–subordinate relationship, the relationship in the fourth category need not be aligned to existing hierarchical structures at all. The mentoring program in this study belonged to the fourth category.

In terms of the history of ideas, the formal mentoring program displays a hallmark of the society in which we live today. This hallmark is commodification. The structured mentoring program takes the mentoring relationship from the private to the public, from the natural to the contrived, from the individual to the masses, from the random to the organised. In the structured mentoring program a so-called natural phenomenon has supposedly been husbanded or harnessed, improved, customised, packaged, and made available to all who wish to make the investment. It is perhaps not surprising that the formal mentoring program demands that the participants be labelled "mentor" or "mentee", a nomenclature generally absent in both the unmanufactured informal context and the ideal world of the imagination.

Two assumptions that underpin formal mentoring programs are that the naturally occurring phenomenon can be replicated and that mentoring capacity is transferable. It is assumed for example that an employee who is an effective mentor in everyday life with one co-worker is likely to be an effective mentor with another in a formal mentoring program. This study showed that the capacity of an individual to be a mentor need not be transferable from one mentee to another, or for that matter, from one context to another even if the mentee were to remain the same.

The differences between the four categories of mentoring constructions and their accompanying contexts identified here provide a partial explanation for some of the difficulties encountered in this program. They led for example to different expectations of what the mentoring relationship should look, sound, and feel like. The expectations that an idealised notion of a mentoring relationship produces are different to those engendered by a low-key mentoring relationship experienced in an informal way in everyday life. These are different again to those of a mentoring relationship between the upwardly mobile young manager and his boss. As a result, some identified the "lack of chemistry" between mentor and mentee as the most important obstacle; some thought it was the formal contrived mentoring context of the action learning project that prevented a "natural" mentoring relationship from developing; while others believed that both mentor and mentee needed a vested or even a common interest in the purpose of the mentoring relationship for it to succeed.

Although participants' different and sometimes conflicting understandings of mentoring may have been partly responsible for the difficulties encountered, at a more fundamental level, the source of many difficulties rested in the incompatibility of the context with characteristics intrinsic to almost all successful mentoring relationships. The overlap common to all four rectangles in Figure 7.1 represents characteristics shared by the four categories of interpretations. The study revealed that this particular mentoring program was unable to provide the conditions for mentoring relationships to develop.

This was mainly due to a context that was too contrived and managed for both the mentee and the mentor, a risk to which other mentoring programs in this category are prone. Elements that were contrived in this program ranged from the specific work context in which the mentoring was to take place to the way in which mentors were to mentor. The mentoring context for instance was the action learning project which proved in most cases to be an extra, discrete, and voluntary task for the mentee and therefore vulnerable to being abandoned. The mentors, although selected for their demonstrated high mentoring abililty, were asked to mentor using specific techniques that were new to them in contexts that were often unfamiliar and in arrangements with mentees with whom they did not have "some form of love relationship" (Levinson, 1978, p. 100).

In summary, the context proved inhospitable to establishing successful mentoring relationships. The relative effortlessness and unforced mutual engagement found in good mentoring relationships were absent here. Absent also was another very important characteristic of the successful mentoring relationship. For the most part, the acknowledged differential between mentor and mentee in terms of relevant expertise—a characteristic common to successful mentoring relationships—did not exist in most of the mentoring arrangements.

The differential in levels of expertise was blurred and in many cases obliterated when the mentoring relationship required an expertise that the mentors did not possess or which the mentees believed they did not possess. In effect, mentors were required to demonstrate sufficient expertise in three areas. The first concerned the topic of the mentee's action learning project itself; the second was in the thinking and reflection skills and concepts presented at the workshop; and because the mentors had been chosen for their perceived existing mentoring capacity, the third area of expertise was the mentor's ability to mentor. There was also a fourth area of expertise against which the mentors themselves evaluated themselves and that was the specific mentoring skills presented at the mentor workshop.

While the selected mentors may have been good mentors in other contexts, their mentoring capacity was not necessarily transferable to this context. Similarly, while the mentees may have been good learners in other mentoring relationships, many failed to be effective learners in the mentoring triads or dyads of this program. In conclusion, this program produced a context too far removed from those contexts in which informal mentoring thrives.

7.4.2 Suitability of facilitated mentoring in the modern workplace

The lack of success of this program in its earlier forms and the subsequent development of the more successful learning groups cast some doubt on the suitability of the mentor–mentee dyad as an effective formal learning partnership in the workplace of today. Although some of the reasons for how the program evolved are particular to the unique circumstances of this case, others may be indicative of the changing nature of work and the way it is organised in today's workplace. This study therefore questions the compatibility of mentoring programs with the twenty-first century workplace.

Implementing a mentoring program based on the traditional mentor–mentee dyad makes certain assumptions about the workplace. It assumes for example, that the workplace exhibits the stability required for formal mentoring relationships to develop. It assumes that the hierarchical element implicit in mentor–mentee relationships is compatible with the hierarchical patterns already present in the workplace. It also seems to assume that an employee's preference is for a one-to-one learning relationship. In this case none of these assumptions was correct.

Even before the massive restructuring process began, the work life of many participants did not exhibit the necessary continuity in job description or even geographic location to establish formal mentoring relationships. Change in job priorities could lead to a different team of co-workers and even a different country. Participants also rejected the hierarchical dimension of the mentoring program which publicly labelled them as mentors or mentees. The overwhelming preference was for egalitarian, status free, learning relationships. The preference was also to replace the dyad with learning partnerships involving a number of people.

The participants' arguments for these preferences were based on the realities of their work life. In terms of expertise, all participants had a valued expertise which in many cases was not possessed by their managers, supervisors, or other co-workers. In terms of learning, the complex work carried out by the participants required interactions and relationships with many people both on- and off- site. The mentor–mentee dyad therefore was inconsistent with their own experience of workplace learning.

The fact that none of the assumptions proved correct in this case might be indicative of the changing nature of workplace and its incompatibility with formal mentoring. The literature on the changing nature of work in this post-industrial information age (Howard, 1995) of flexible capitalism (Sennett, 1998), flexible specialisation (Aronowitz & DeFazio, 1994), and reflexive modernisation (Beck, 2000) suggests that the changing content of work and how it is organised is producing many different configurations of relationships in workplaces. In the last two decades for example, the lateral or team-based organisational architecture has emerged. It is generating different webs of relationships from those found in the pyramidal hierarchies of the traditional organisation that are clearly delineated in the box and line organisational charts still present in some organisations (Mohrman & Cohen, 1995). The dynamics of the workplace are also changing in response to a growing trend for organisations to adopt a staffing model in which there is a small, core group of full-time permanent staff and a large, peripheral group of contracted consultants and casualised project workers (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1996).

If the origins of workplace mentoring programs are indeed in the apprenticeship model of the pre-industrial era when "the guilds ruled the commercial world" (Clutterbuck, 1991, p. 1), then the potential for obsolescence is inevitably there. This case study indicates that formal mentoring relationships may not only be ineffective formal learning relationships, but they may also be impossible to accommodate in the existing web of workplace relationships.

7.5 Contribution to our understanding of formal peer learning support systems

This study suggests there are alternative support systems to formal mentoring programs that have more potential as strategies for guided learning. In this case such a system comprised a number of loosely interconnected elements, namely, mentor–mentee dyads, co-mentoring dyads, and support groups facilitated by a member trained in skills that encouraged learning interactions. The "hub" of the interconnected network was the group mentors or facilitators who met regularly with the H R Development Officer and the researcher.

Chapter Six showed that the support system displayed characteristics of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the making. Through the mutual engagement of participants, the negotiation of a joint enterprise, and the development of a shared repertoire of resources (Wenger, 1998), beginnings of community coherence became evident. Evident also was the slow accumulation of the building blocks of social capital—the networks, norms, and trust—required to achieve the group's common purpose. Although by no means presented here as an example of best practice, the support system into which the mentoring program evolved also showed some of the features of a learning community as described by Wenger (1998), Falk and Kilpatrick (2000), and Schein (1993, 1995).

The evolution of the dyadic mentoring program into a learning support system displaying many of the characteristics of a community of practice suggests that for some professional development and training purposes, a "learning community" model is more useful than the mentoring program. In comparison with communities of practice organised around professional concerns, areas of expertise, or special interests, communities such as these are born under very different sets of circumstances. While other communities of practice may be voluntary, self-determining, self-moderating, and often informal, communities designed to be peer learning support systems are likely not to be. This section first draws attention to three of the factors that contribute to their uniqueness: their purpose for coming into being, their location, and their genesis. It then explores how the notion of social capital helps explain the functioning of a peer learning support system as a community of practice and its contribution to the organisation in which it is located.

7.5.1 Peer support system as a learning community of practice

Peer learning support systems are implemented as part of professional development initiatives for one reason. They are to provide an environment that maximises the chances of having the skills and content of training workshops "take" in the participants' practice back on the job. In some cases, including the subject of this study, they are also the mechanism that provides continuity of learning experience between one cohort of learners and the next. For the company, support systems are an additional investment made in anticipation of maximising the return on its initial investment in workshops and courses. Whether they take the form of mentoring programs, communities of practice, or some other structure, their longevity depends on their performance and this is ultimately judged not by its members but by management.

Given this context, the "community of practice" model requires particular attention to mechanisms and practices that make it a "learning community" for adults in the workplace. As well as providing a safe but challenging environment where errors can be made (Schein, 1993), the community needs to account for the fact that not all participants want to or can learn at the same rate, at the same time or in the same way. This study indicates that one critical element is the community's capacity to accommodate and welcome multiple and changing forms of membership. A second element indicative of a learning community is continuity of experience which allows participants to draw on past experiences in the community and develop a common vision. As the eighteen-month long experience in this case showed, for a peer learning support system to develop as a learning community time is required. A third critical element is the dimension of externality (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) which refers to the nature of the community's interactions with other communities especially with the rest of the organisation in which it is embedded.

Because the intended purpose of the learning community is to produce new learnings that change professional practice, its location is almost always within the larger community of the organisation as illustrated in Figure 6.2 in the previous chapter. More precisely, the new community of practice is likely to straddle multiple sub-communities with their own cultures, histories, human capital, and social capital that, together, constitute the organisation. This reality has a number of consequences for the learning community in terms of its membership and how it functions and develops. While it is intended to be an agent for intra-organisational change, its survival and sustainability depend on how well it is accommodated within the existing configuration of communities and their accompanying vagaries.

The process of finding the "community of best fit" requires ongoing flexibility on the community's part to make the necessary structural adjustments as well as changes to their practices and membership. It also requires formal and informal mechanisms to gauge on an ongoing basis the response to its presence of the larger organism in which it is located. As this case showed, potential pitfalls are many ranging from being labelled a "secret society" to inadvertently favouring those sub-communities whose members enjoyed more autonomy and less surveillance in their everyday work than others.

The vulnerability experienced by the new community of practice in the workplace has its origins in the conditions in which the community begins. By definition, there *is* no community in the initial stages because, to use Wenger's (1998), there is no "regime of competence" (p. 136). There is only a group of people linked by an espoused common purpose that has yet to be operationalised. Members have yet to accumulate experience or personal practical knowledge in being members of the group and in the new ways of thinking and doing that the professional development was about. While members may be experts in other contexts in the workplace, in this particular context, they are novices (Benner, 1984; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986).

7.5.2 Formal peer learning support systems build social capital

In Chapter Three intra-organisational social capital was described as the resources that are available to an organisation by virtue of the networks of relationships that exist within the organisation (Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Leenders & Gabbay, 1999b; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The organisation's learning capacity and the intellectual capital that it produces are included amongst those resources. Common to most explanations of social capital is the importance given to the structural linkages forming the networks, their norms, and the kinds and levels of trust operating in those networks.

This study has shown that the notion of social capital is useful in understanding how peer learning support systems function and how they contribute to an organisation. Social capital is implicated in these interventions because at the heart of even the most traditional dyadic mentoring program is the intent to create new social relations through introducing new networks of relationships or new ways of interaction in existing relationships. This is particularly evident in learning support systems more complex than the dyad such as those in this case.

Social capital helps explain how a peer learning support system functions by highlighting the importance of norms, networks, and trust to its sustainability in a workplace that already has its own stock of social capital. This study indicates that, in the first instance, the support system must build its own unique social capital as well as drawing on existing social capital.

Through social capital building it generates the cohesion necessary for defining itself as a community within the larger community of the organisation. The study showed that this takes time and ongoing effort by its members as well as a set of environmental conditions supportive of the community's existence.

As with other communities of common purpose, ongoing interactions were the source of social capital production in the developing learning community of this study. Through much dialogue in formal and informal settings, participants began to develop their own social capital. New formal and informal networks and relationships within the participant group, the gradual building of trust, the practice of regular presentations and group meetings, the use of specialised language, and group communication channels such as electronic mail were all indicators of social capital building. Most importantly, a mentoring style of interaction was being espoused as the preferred style of interaction and was being increasingly practised within the community.

The notion of social capital also alerts us to possible sources of resistance or even of hostility toward peer learning support systems from what Schein (1995) calls the "immune system" of an organisation. The peer learning support system lies within the boundaries of an organisation that already has its stock of social capital. However the norms, networks, and trust that are social capital for the organisation may be a social liability for the emerging learning community.

So far I have reflected only on how social capital can help us understand how a peer learning support system operates within a workplace. Social capital is also part of the contribution that such interventions make to the organisation as a whole. Although the literature on mentoring programs and other professional development interventions focuses on knowledge and skills outcomes, this study showed that the new norms, networks, and levels of trust generated by the learning support system are also an outcome. Social capital produced by the learning support system potentially contributes to the organisation in two ways. First, because social capital of the right kind is a pre-requisite to the learning of new skills and knowledge, peer learning support systems contribute to the organisation's human capital by generating the new kinds of social capital necessary for learning. Second, the social capital created is a resource that enters the circulation of the organisation and can therefore be accessed for productive purposes other than the ones originally intended. In conclusion, the social capital produced by peer learning support systems, in particular by the community of practice model, can be both the means to an end and, in great measure, part of the end itself.

7.6 Contribution to collaborative research practice

Researcher participation in the field is often described in terms of role and when discussed in terms of relationships, the discussion tends to be confined to the personal one-to-one relationship between the researcher and the participant (Ulichny and Schoener, 1996). These descriptions, although useful, provide a limited conceptualisation of the researcher's presence in the field especially in collaborative, long-term, research projects such as in this case where, at different times, the researcher was ethnographer and consultant (Schein, 1987). The concept of "role" for example, does not explain the unscripted fluidity and change in the researcher's interactions with participants and while that of "researcher–researched relationship" does account for at least some aspects of change, it seems to do so only at the micro level of interaction between participant and researcher.

Rather than role or relationship, this study draws on Wenger's (1998) social theory of identity formation to propose the construct of "researcher identity" as a useful way of interpreting the researcher's changing experience in the field. Wenger's theory argues that our identity and our memberships of the various communities of practice to which we belong are mutually constituting. Most importantly, identity is about how we reconcile those various memberships. Because the nature of our memberships is a function of time and of our interaction with other members of the respective communities, the memberships qualitatively change. Consequently, as our memberships change, so too, does our identity.

From this perspective, the researcher and in particular, the on-site researcher belongs to at least two pertinent communities of practice—that of the research community and that of the participant community in the field. Each requires a different kind of membership defined in part by her nonmembership of the workplace in which the participant group is located and by her primary membership in the research community. Reconciling the dual membership is an ongoing process and in this research it included a brokering function.

In this case while each community had its own practices, they were also connected through formal contracts and "psychological contracts" (Schein, 1987). These interconnections clustered around maintaining fidelity to each community's objectives and managing each community's risk portfolio associated with the collaboration. Brokering at these interfaces became an important component in how I reconciled the different and sometimes conflicting demands and expectations of the two communities.

The value that the concept of identity as described in Chapter Six and summarised here has to understanding the field experience of collaborative research of the kind conducted in this study lies in its capacity to do two things. First, it explains that the way the researcher interacts in the field is a function of how she reconciles her membership in two communities of practice—the research team and the participant group. Second, it shows that the meso level at which the two communities of practice are formally related impacts on the micro level at which the researcher interacts with members of either community and vice versa. How the researcher reconciles her changing dual memberships of communities that are different, interdependent, and also changing, determines her identity in the field and thus how she interacts or does not interact.

7.7 Implications for workplace professional development

The point of collaborative research is to produce knowledge that is useful to practice and this study suggests some guidelines for consultants and trainers to consider. One major implication for Human Resource Development initiatives concerns the discerning use of mentoring programs as a learning support system in the workplace. A second implication invites H R personnel to consider alternative models of peer support that have groups of people rather than the mentor–mentee relationship as their basis. The third implication concerns how an organisation evaluates any form of peer learning support mechanism.

7.7.1 Mentoring programs – proceed with caution

The purposes and contexts for which conventional mentoring programs can be used as a strategy for guided learning are limited. As this study showed, mentoring programs become redundant if the context or purpose for which the program was intended dissipates. The design of the action learning project, which was the context in this case, made mentoring difficult. Implementers of mentoring programs should carefully ascertain whether the context and the purpose for which the mentoring program is implemented are robust enough in their own right. As this case illustrated, mentoring programs designed to support mentees in voluntary projects are at risk because, for any number of reasons, activity that's voluntary may terminate prematurely. Mentoring programs of the kind described in this study are also clearly not suitable for workplaces where work takes participants off site for weeks or months at a time.

Probably the most important mentoring-related implication for practitioners from this study concerns the dynamics of the mentor–mentee relationship itself. It is possible for the formal mentoring relationship to have connotations for either party that make the relationship unworkable. In a professional workplace where hierarchical structures are being reconfigured, where your boss need not necessarily know more than you, and where you seek advice or just talk things over with any number of people within the one department or, more likely, across departments and even across organisations, the traditional differentials of expertise and position associated with formal mentoring relationships need no longer have currency.

The passion with which mentoring has been embraced by some training consultants, human resource departments, and organisations does not always match that of the participants in such programs—as evidenced in this case. It is perhaps edifying to recall that the original Mentor of roughly two thousand eight hundred years ago was a product of the imagination and that its rebirth in the 17th century in a didactic novel by a French mystic was also a literary manifestation. It was only in the 18th century that the word "mentor" came to be documented as a common noun and it has only been in the last thirty years that the formal mentoring relationship exists as a concept. This study suggests that perhaps the notion of "mentor" best belongs to the realm of the imagination and that a more realistic objective is to develop a mentoring style of interaction that promotes learning in the workplace. If a mentoring style to interactions is the desired outcome then the application of Benner's model of skill acquisition to mentoring reproduced in Chapter Three could prove useful. For the implementer of mentoring programs it is important not to conflate a "mentoring style" with a "mentor–mentee" relationship. Co-workers can interrelate using a mentoring style of interaction without having to construct themselves as mentor or mentee. As this case showed, a mentoring style of interaction need not be the "next best thing" to a mentoring relationship. In this case it *was* the best thing.

7.7.2 Learning communities – a possible alternative

This study showed that a peer learning support system based on different configurations of like-minded learners was more effective in meeting the objectives of the program than a collection of discrete mentor–mentee dyadic social arrangements. In this case the groups were interconnected through shared membership and shared activities and together, displayed characteristics of a community of practice and a learning community.

Although in this case the initial design was not that of a community of practice, the study suggests that the "community of practice" model can be used to design peer learning support systems. The dimensions of such communities that have been identified by researchers including Wenger (1998), Falk and Kilpatrick (2000), and Schein (1993, 1995) help provide the direction for their development and evaluation. For the implementer of such a system, this study shows that some of the key considerations are: the importance of participant ownership; legitimacy of the community within the workplace; flexibility of membership; continuity; the capacity to access external expertise if necessary; and above all—opportunities for the system to evolve.

7.7.3 Value of peer learning support systems

The question of how to effectively measure the success of peer learning support schemes rates highly for the management of any organisation. Determining the return such a scheme brings to an organisation in comparison to the cost involved in establishing and maintaining it is fraught with problems. In most cases, the largest component of the cost is probably the cost of the time participants spend in attending meetings and other extra activities and the time spent by personnel in monitoring the process. A direct relationship between the cost and the change to the organisation's bottom line is difficult if not impossible to determine.

This is especially so in professional development training of the kind delivered in this project where the focus is on personal development and meta-learning skills such as reflection and thinking. It is also learning that does not necessarily produce results in the short term and in fact might take several years before consistent change in performance is evident. Not only is it difficult for management to determine the value of mentoring programs that support this kind of professional development, it is sometimes difficult for the participants themselves to know whether their effort has been worthwhile.

Through trial and error, management resolved some of the issues concerning value in this case. They considered indicators such as the number of times that specialised terms from the training were used in everyday work, attendance at support meetings, and the use of the library references. They listened to anecdotes reporting change from participants or co-workers. Managers agreed that it was important for them to be actively involved in the project so that they could use their own personal experience as well as the experience recounted by others to help make early assessments. In practice, most managers withdrew from the project when the workplace demands on their time became too great.

In this case group meetings provided the environment to share anecdotal evidence of change or attempted change in one's own practice or in that of others. In many instances this interaction caused participants to realise that there had been shifts in their thinking which they had not noticed.

The group nature of the peer learning support system into which the mentoring program evolved provided a self-regulating function that served to enhance the value of both the support mechanism and the content of the training to the organisation. It did this by providing a forum where the members felt safe to critique their own performance and to discuss and implement changes that would add value to the program for future participants.

This thesis does not provide any definitive answers to the vexing issue of ascertaining value other than to identify it as a critical issue. However, the study did show that, in any consideration of value, changes in an organisation's social capital attributable to the peer learning support system need to be accounted for. Changes in the networks, norms and kinds of trust circulating within the organisation generated by the learning peer support systems are as important as the changes in skills and knowledge resources which are normally referred to as an organisation's human capital. As well as social capital being an indicator of learning, it can be of value in its own right. How to determine whether those changes affect professional performance is another major consideration. It is critical that the issue of value should be discussed, clarified, and documented as often as is required to the satisfaction of management, the participants, and the trainers.

7.8 Directions for further research

This thesis raises serious concerns about the limitations of the traditional mentor–mentee arrangement as the cornerstone of peer learning support systems in the workplace. Much of the existing literature on mentoring comes from program evaluations that reveal little about how the formal mentoring relationship is constructed in practice. Qualitative research using methods such as in-depth interviewing and journalling that explore different constructions of formal mentoring relationships would contribute to a more realistic assessment of the usefulness of such programs in the workplace.

More research is required on the types of learning communities that evolved in this case. Longitudinal studies of the life-cycle of similar cases using narrative analysis for example, will further our understanding on how these communities form, develop, and eventually die. Internal and external factors that impact on their wellbeing and the contributions they make to the larger community of which they are a part are important areas for research. As well as learning communities of the type that evolved in this case, research on other forms of formal learning relationships and peer learning support systems is called for in a period when workplaces are being reconfigured.

Three particular lines of inquiry concerning learning communities arise from this study. First, research needs to be done on the kinds of leadership that such learning communities need in order to form and be sustainable. In this case, leadership of different forms and at different times was displayed by management, the H R Development Officer, the half dozen core members of the mentor group, on occasion by peripheral members of the group, and also by me. It seems that the leadership dimension is important to understanding how an emerging community is championed and progressed.

Second, the processes of diffusion and osmosis that occur between the learning community and the organisation in which it is located need more investigation. Here I am referring to how human and social capital cross the boundaries between the learning community and the rest of the workplace. Understanding the factors that affect the permeability of those boundaries either to or from the workplace is important to understanding how change in professional practice occurs.

Third, more research is required in how social capital is used and generated by peer support learning structures and the kinds of benefits and disadvantages that it may bring to participants and to the workplace overall. This kind of research will add to our knowledge on the relationship between workplace learning and social elements such as networks, norms, and trust.

This kind of research will provide a firmer basis for managing and evaluating peer learning support systems in the workplace including mentoring programs. As this study has already indicated, social capital is one resource that tends to be underestimated or even ignored as a possible outcome for the organisation.

7.9 Conclusion

This study told the story of a group of professional men and women in search of effective peer learning support arrangements to help them and their co-workers be better thinking and reflective learners and practitioners. The study revealed that in this case the conventional mentor–mentee dyad relationship was, for the most part, inappropriate. The intrinsic hierarchical nature of the formal mentoring relationship with its limited membership of two people made it incompatible with a group of professional colleagues who preferred more egalitarian and less intimate learning partnerships between a number of people. While acknowledging the importance to learning of the more personal one–one interactions with their colleagues, they preferred those kinds of relationships to occur informally and outside the structure of the formally organised support system.

A more beneficial configuration proved to be a loosely interconnected arrangement of multiple groups of learners. Together, the groups formed a learning community in which useful knowledge and identity resources were drawn on, developed, and shared. A mentoring style of interaction that supported and challenged co-learners was promoted as the norm.

The need for organisations to nurture the development of effective peer learning support arrangements whether they be mentoring programs, the kinds of learning communities described in this thesis, or other configurations is supported by adult learning theory. The nature of people's connectedness to their environment and the nature of their learning are intermeshed because one impacts on the other.

Ted's story, which began this chapter, was selected neither for its typicalness nor for its uniqueness. The value of Ted's story to this final chapter is that in a few short word strokes his story encapsulates the fundamental issues about how adults learn that confront an organisation wanting to promote learning in its workplace. If the Teds of this world were to find that they were in fact alone or that they did not have the means to connect with like minded colleagues, then surely this would be a sad indictment on any organisation professing to be a learning one. The challenge to organisations is to ensure that when the Teds of their workplace are ready and wanting to make connections with co-learners, that the norms, networks, and trust for them to do so are there. Or if they're not, at least the conditions for the necessary kind of social capital to develop exist.

The contribution that this thesis has made to understanding work based peer learning support systems is three-fold. First, it has questioned the suitability of dyad based mentoring programs for some contexts where peer supported learning is desirable. Second, it has suggested that as a support system, the kind of learning community described in this study can be a superior alternative to the conventional mentoring program. Third, it has shown the significance of social capital to understanding how peer support learning structures function and contribute to the workplace.

The complexities of the changing nature of work, workplaces, and work relationships make research on organised peer learning support systems an ongoing process. For researchers and practitioners the imperative is to seek those kinds of learning relationships that are compatible with the new relationship patterns that are being forged in the workplace of today.

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