INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF A MANAGER AS A FACILITATOR OF ONGOING INFORMAL WORK RELATED LEARNING

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
DEC	Department of Education and Communities
DET	Department of Education and Training
TAFE NSW	Technical and Further Education in New South Wales
HRD	Human Resource Development
RTO	Registered Training Organisation

Abstract

Contemporary organisations need, and increasingly expect, managers to manage, and develop competent teams and to contribute to the capability development of their organisations. Line managers are required to actively develop the skills, experience and knowledge of workers so that they can maintain productive and sustainable practices. Such roles are widely considered valuable and integral to investing in, and building, individual and organisational capabilities. Despite these expectations, responsibilities and values, the actual roles that line managers play in facilitating on-the-job worker learning have attracted little attention in work related learning literature and limited consideration in the development of informal learning practices in organisations.

Although previous studies have identified the types of learning conditions which support worker learning, there is still a general lack of understanding about how, and in what ways, line managers facilitate informal, ongoing, worker learning and what influences their ability to carry out this role. The present research project draws on concepts of situated learning, human resource development, workplace learning and organisational learning, to explore and highlight key elements of the role so as to give some clarity and identity to the role of managers in how they actually facilitate ongoing, on-the-job work related learning. The research project is informed by four cases within a holistic case study located in a large vocational education and training organisation in New South Wales. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with Operations Managers and Staff Development Managers and from reviews of a range of organisational documents.

The cases indicate that the fostering of collaborative social relationships and sharing roles of facilitating learning with co-workers are key strategies deployed

by Operations Managers. Managers are also highly committed to creating opportunities for worker learning, encouraging and guiding participation in learning related activities, and managing the context of work to foster ongoing learning. At an organisational level, however, the manager's facilitative learning role tends to lack any significant acknowledgement, support or guidance from within the organisation. The cases have enabled the facilitative learning role of managers to be identified, differentiated from other management roles and given legitimacy as a practice. The research has provided a rationale for raising awareness of the importance and need for acknowledgement of the manager's role in facilitating context based worker learning.

Outcomes of the research project include a framework and an ideal model for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning. The research also proposes that, in recognition of the need for continuous facilitation of on-the-job worker learning, a new way for managers and organisations to refer to a manager's role in facilitating worker learning is as a 'facilitator of ongoing work related learning and developer of working knowledges'. The research project proposes a number of recommendations for TAFE NSW to contribute to improving the ways in which the non-teaching manager's role in facilitating informal worker learning is recognised, acknowledged, and supported by the organisation.

CHAPTER 1: THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT, THE BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT, THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This chapter provides the structure of the thesis and explains the aims, objectives and motivations for the research project. An overview of the concepts of workplace and facilitative learning strategies are included along with an introduction to the role of the Operations Manager in the context of the research. The research questions and arguments for the research, which form the basis of the research processes and design, follow. The chapter concludes with an outline of the contents of each chapter of this thesis.

1.1 Establishing a need to explore and better understand the role of a manager as a facilitator of work related learning.

This thesis sets out the design and outcomes of the research project which inquires into the role of a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) NSW college Operations Manager as a facilitator of work related learning. The study is framed by widely held views which firmly position the workplace as a site of valuable informal and ongoing contextualised learning.

There are three main purposes of the research project. The three main purposes are to:

- to inquire into current manager practices in facilitating work related learning
- improve understanding and awareness of the facilitative learning role of line managers
- propose ways in which managers can improve their facilitative learning practice

More specifically, the purpose of the research is to explore specific facilitative learning practices, including ongoing strategies deployed and skills applied by line managers in their day-to-day work to facilitate worker learning. The intent of the research is to consider what is already known about the role of managers as facilitators of work related learning and combine this with outcomes from the present research project. This will enable the development of a more comprehensive sense of what it is that line managers *actually* do to facilitate ongoing on-the-job work related learning for others. That is, to give some order to a complex and, thus far, a largely under-developed concept and practice.

The research project will enable the documentation of examples of the day-to-day practical experiences and perspectives of line managers in how they facilitate work related learning in a contemporary workplace. The intention of documenting practices is to gather evidence which can then be used to raise awareness of the manager's role and actual practice. Such evidence could then be drawn upon by others to better recognise and acknowledge the role of a manager in contributing to ongoing worker and organisational capability development. Such evidence could also be used to highlight the facilitative learning component and practice of a manager and thus differentiate the role practice from other management roles. In addition, the purpose of the research is to name key components of the role, suggest a concept or a new way of thinking about the role and finally, to present a practice based framework and an ideal model for manager facilitation of informal work related learning

The research project is framed by three main arguments. Firstly, it argues that the role played by a line manager in facilitating informal and ongoing on-the-job work related learning for workers is valuable for developing worker capabilities in organisations. This is underpinned by an observation that the pace of change in contemporary organisations has created an unprecedented need for workers to be able to confidently address new customer demands and to operate and embrace new technologies, and new processes and practices in their places of work.

Secondly, the research project argues that the role is largely an assumed role which has been afforded little attention in recent literature or in contemporary organisations. As a result the concept of managers as facilitators of informal work related learning tends to be understood by managers and senior executives in public organisations only in broad terms, typically indistinguishable from other roles. As a consequence, the practices of managers in facilitating ongoing worker learning remain largely under-recognised and thus under-developed. Little has been documented about how, and in what ways, managers actually facilitate informal on-the-job work related learning nor what influences their facilitative learning practices in the context of day-to-day work. Contemporary literature reveals plentiful discussion about informal learning processes and ideal informal learning conditions but there are few conceptualisations of this element of a manager's day-to-day responsibilities. Further, reviews of a number of human resource development and management policy and procedure documents produced by TAFE NSW, a large state government department, indicate few references to managers taking on such roles or to the practice of facilitating on-the-job worker learning. Overall, a manager's on-the-job learning facilitation role tends to be insufficient in detail in the way it is articulated, aggregated or reflected in TAFE NSW workplace discourse and documents. This is an area within the field of work related learning which would benefit from further research. This research project makes a contribution to better understanding manager facilitation of on-the-job worker learning and the role of, and influences on, managers in this process.

Thirdly, this research project argues that given the current working environment there is potential for this role to contribute significantly to an organisation's capability development goals. Thus, for organisations to capitalise on this valuable resource, they could improve the ways in which they acknowledge and support managers in facilitating ongoing work related learning for others. To do this, managers, in the interests of the governing organisation, need to improve their understanding of the role and what aids and challenges managers. Managers and organisational decision makers also need to better understand

the potential implications for future development of the role for managers, for worker learners, and for the organisation's business sustainability.

The arguments in this research project are supported by several key themes emerging in recent literature. There is a strong sense in the literature that manager involvement in ongoing worker learning is being recognised for its capacity to make valuable contributions to building organisational capability (Beckett 1999; Bratton et al. 2004; Macneil 2001, 2003; Watkins & Marsick 1993). Line managers appear to be increasingly held accountable for training and learning of workers and this is coinciding with a gradual shift in responsibility for worker learning moving away from human resource units (Smith 2006). The expectations that line managers develop strategies to facilitate informal on-the-job worker learning, and to make contributions to strategic workforce development and business goals, are similarly growing. But, despite the changes in direction, there continues to be only modest discussion about the role of a manager in facilitating worker learning and few observations about how organisations acknowledge and support managers to effectively carry out such a role. The roles managers play in assisting and supporting worker learning have been noted variously in the contexts of mentoring and coaching (Ellinger et al. 2011; Heron 1993; Lewis 2000) and in managing day-to-day projects (Coetzer 2006; Reuber 1997). But, on the whole, the ways in which line managers bring together workplace practices and develop strategies to facilitate ongoing worker learning are largely overshadowed by other day-to-day management practices. In literature, the facilitation of informal work related learning by line managers also tends to lack differentiation from other management roles. As a consequence, the role tends to lack conceptualisation, identity, clarity and recognition within organisations.

In the late 1990's a number of authors pointed out that little attention had been given to the changing realities and roles of managers in making contributions to building learning organisations (Ulrich, Von Glinow and Jick 1993 cited in

Ellinger et al, 1999, p.107). Ellinger and others also noted the need for more empirical studies on how managers lead and facilitate learning in organisations. Now, in the early part of the 21st century, the role of managers as facilitators of worker learning is still a largely under-developed concept and practice that is not well understood. The current context of change in workplaces, and the need for workers in organisations to keep up with ongoing change, has escalated the need to inquire more diligently into how managers actively facilitate informal, on-the-job work related learning.

The growing importance of the role of line managers in developing on-the-job capabilities of workers, in itself, suggests a need to explore and understand the role in more detail. As Burns (2002, p. 310) suggests, developing people in organisations is not just a matter of attending formal courses, but rather, it is concerned with the learning process and the system within which this process occurs. Teare and Rayner (2002, p. 356) and others also recognise that both work and learning need to be integrated and aligned with organisational core values, strategic objectives and worker development interests, and that these objectives be effectively endorsed at a senior management level. Smith (2006) and Rainbird (2004 in Smith 2006, p.235) for example, also suggests that managers are increasingly being held accountable for training and learning in Australian and British organisations. Ellinger and Cseh (2007, p. 448) also note that the role of managers is changing to include role modelling and behaviours which reinforce the development of others. Similarly, Watkins and Marsick (1993) emphasise the need for managers and organisations as a whole, to maintain competitive relevance, they need to be competent in encouraging collaboration among workers, in empowering people toward a collective vision, in making connections with the local environment and, importantly, in making space for new beliefs, that is, new ways of thinking and acting. In a similar vein, Schuck (cited in Candy & Matthews 1998, p. 23) notes that managers need to be 'managers of inquiry', that is, to listen, to solve problems, create opportunities for learning and become an active participant in the learning process. But despite these observations there is also a feeling in some recent

work related learning literature that organisations often fall short of providing the type of support line managers need to assist them in developing worker capabilities (Bierema & Eraut 2004, p. 59).

It is also important to note that the objectivity of manager lead organisational focused learning has been problematised by some authors, for example Contu, Grey and Ortenblad (2003), Solomon (2001) and Fenwick (2001). Similarly, the close working relationship between a worker and a manager, worker fear of identifying as a learner to his or manager (Boud & Solomon 2003, p. 330) and the attitude of managers toward worker learning adds complexity to the role of a manager as a facilitator of work related learning (Ellinger & Cseh 2007, p. 447). In addition, suggestions are made that work related learning can focus on individual learning but the overall aim is to achieve organisational goals. This type of organisational learning does not necessarily support the broadening of worker knowledges. Contu, Grey and Ortenblad (2003, p. 936) suggest that this type of organisational culture can be perceived as a form of organisational control rather than one which fosters a culture effective worker learning.

A key question arising for this research project is 'can managers apply sufficient objectivity in how they create opportunities and guide workers to participate in learning related activities in their day-to-day facilitative learning practices?' While managers are responsible for managing productivity in the interests of their organisations, this may not necessarily allow, or align well with, strategies which encourage new ways of thinking and developing more efficient ways of working. Managers who actively support work related on-the-job learning have, sometimes, been viewed as promoting cultures of sameness in workplaces, thereby undermining the development of variety and difference in thinking and practicing (Contu, Grey & Ortenblad 2003, p. 936; Solomon 1999, p. 125). In facilitating worker learning managers need to continually make judgments about how they address the issue of meeting both organisational and individual capability development needs. They need to be able to deploy strategies which

assist workers to gain and apply the skills they need to work productively, and, at the same time, assist workers to gain experiences which will prepare them as individuals to meet future organisational challenges.

The changing context of contemporary workplaces and the need to maintain productive work related practices are however, key catalysts for managers to facilitate worker learning. In this research project, it is argued that manager facilitation of informal worker learning is an effective strategy for worker learners to build their work related skills and knowledges. It is similarly argued that line managers play key roles in influencing this process. The background to the changing context of work in TAFE NSW colleges is outlined in the next section.

1.2 The background and changing context of the business of TAFE NSW

The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (DEC) is a large State government organisation in the State of NSW, Australia. The NSW DEC provides training for pre-school age children, primary and secondary school education and a wide range of vocational education and training to individuals, businesses and industry. TAFE NSW is the tertiary vocational training arm of the department. TAFE NSW is primarily resourced by State and Commonwealth funds and is tasked with managing vocational and community training to meet government commitments in the area of vocational education and training reforms. Over the last decade overall government funds allocated on a recurrent basis to TAFE Institutes in Australia have reduced (Anderson 2005, p. 34). In more recent years, however, overall operating funds, allocated to VET training organisations by governments, have increased (National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2012) but competition for these funds, created by new training market influences in NSW, has also increased (Ferrier, Dumbrell & Burke 2008, p. 13) making access to government funds more difficult. In response to the changing funding and training environment, TAFE NSW has been implementing strategies to increase its commercial

business capabilities in marketing and selling training and training products (Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2009b, 2009c). The building of its reputation and capability in the ever more competitive vocational training market is a key current concern for the organisation.

The pace and nature of change in day-to-day work in State Government agencies, is creating a growing need for workers to quickly develop their skills and experiences to deliver effective services to customers. The organisation's strategic workforce development priorities indicate a range of goals in the area of developing staff. The goals include better support for workforce capability development, to address multi-generational workforce needs, to build an inclusive workforce culture and to initiate and embrace change and strong social partnerships (Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2009b). It is unclear however, how the organisation, through its managers, supervisors and business partners, intends to fulfill these goals.

TAFE NSW consists of ten Institutes in metropolitan and regional areas in NSW, collectively managing 120 colleges. Each year TAFE NSW enrols approximately 400,000 students. Large metropolitan colleges enrol between 8,000 and 10,000 students per year while smaller colleges enrol less than 5,000 students per year. Small regional colleges may enrol only several hundred students each year. TAFE NSW offers over 1,200 courses including, for example, vocational preparation programs in literacy and numeracy, a wide range of trade training for apprentices and trainees, professional programs in business, information technology, design, engineering, hospitality, health, community services, bio-medical sciences, nursing, building and construction and many more. TAFE NSW also offers a wide range of short accredited and non-accredited commercial programs for businesses, industry groups and other government agencies. Commercial course revenue and the relationships colleges develop with these groups are set to become more important to Institute viability in the future.

Like most other government organisations, TAFE NSW has to meet a range of State and Commonwealth government targets in training provision. These include increasing student access to, and provision of, recognition of existing student skills and experience, increasing the number of students who complete higher level qualifications and increasing retraining options for older workers. In response to government strategic goals, TAFE NSW Institutes develop five year Strategic Plans to address government reforms and set goals and to develop strategies for building new and sustainable business opportunities.

In response to reduced Commonwealth and State government funding, TAFE NSW Institutes and colleges have commenced implementing strategies to reduce spending. The number and nature of products (courses) are gradually reducing and changing and new systems and policies are improving services for students and other customers. At the same time the number of staff are being rationalised to align with current business modelling. Similarly, Institute strategic and annual business plans universally include goals and targets to increase commercial revenue, develop commercial partnerships, grow external client relations and manage cost effective and sustainable business operations (for example, Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2009c). TAFE NSW offers a small number of degree programs. Additional new qualifications are added to the course portfolio each year.

The new strategic targets have placed significant new demands on staff to work differently. Courses and qualifications are increasingly being referred to in day-to-day work related discourse as 'training products', students are 'customers' and industry contacts are 'clients'. Commercial business and the delivery of programs in workplaces characterise the emerging new educational 'edu-business' environment (Carter & Ellis-Gulli 2010, 2011) in TAFE NSW. A consequence of this is that Institutes and colleges need to build staff capabilities and expertise to support the increasing commercial business activity. This includes supporting the sale of training services and supporting student

enrolments and course delivery. Thus the organisation as a whole, needs to build staff expertise to work in more customer focused, adaptive and flexible ways.

The changing work and training landscape is raising a number of issues for vocational education providers, and the way in which vocational training is provided. At National and State levels, recommendations for reforms in vocational education and training in Australia highlight the need for change in workforce participation and development. The recent Skills Australia (2011) '*Skills for prosperity: a road map for vocational education and training*' paper outlines changes that need to take place over the next ten years to ensure Australia meets its future skills needs. Key reforms call for increases in workforce participation, enterprise productivity and social inclusion. One recommendation specifically calls for improved provision of not only foundation employment related skills, but also to prepare workers to be adaptable and flexible to meet the challenges of the changing workplace. The reforms put in place are also intended to contribute to the building of worker capabilities to competently use new technologies and work in environmentally sustainable ways (Skills Australia 2011, p. 25). The paper also recommends organisations better use, deploy and redeploy employee skills and to provide fulfilling careers and meaningful work (p.26). On a broader level, the paper advocates increased investment in skills and workforce participation, as a way to significantly contribute to longer term national prosperity.

There are also national strategies which require that vocational training organisations increase workplace training and assessment rates as a way to improve national training outcomes and industry demands for skilled and employable workers. Such goals largely concern the delivery and assessment of formal training. Many of the services which support these training initiatives are provided by non-teaching staff in colleges. Examples include preparation of technical materials for demonstration and delivery in workplaces, administration

of student records and quality assurance of teaching and assessment. This suggests a need for not only teachers but also for non-teaching staff and managers such as student support officers, librarians, counsellors, careers advisors, administrators and technical staff to be well prepared and well equipped to support teaching and learning. Preliminary observations conducted for this research project suggest that college support staff roles will need to change to accommodate and support new teaching methods, technologies and streamlined administrative processes. Also, many current vocational training programs, apprenticeships and traineeships, include requirements for participation by learners in work-based training and work experience. In most cases, line managers and supervisors are contractually required to be involved in guiding these forms of on-the-job learning processes. At the same time, non-teaching staff are expecting to play wider roles in contributing to student learning outcomes and in developing and retaining corporate knowledge (Callan 2005, p. 18). Key capabilities for non-teaching managers in vocational education and training organisations identified by Callan and colleagues (2007, p. 21) include for example, the ability to operate in more business focused ways, to motivate, collaborate, work strategically and provide support to their staff to work effectively in the changing environment.

Surprisingly, however, there has been little other interest in inquiring further to ascertain how non-teaching managers facilitate informal and ongoing worker learning nor how they contribute to vocational education and training outcomes. Of the management and leadership related programs that are offered, most are fragmented, short in duration and tend to be only weakly linked to strategic goals (Callan et al. 2007). This is not to say however, that Operations Managers do not work effectively in these areas. Preliminary observations for this research project also suggested that Operations Managers facilitate worker learning in a range of ways and this acknowledged in the research project. Operations Managers in TAFE NSW colleges appear to have effective practices for effectively managing their teams, working teams productively and meeting expected outcomes. However, the strategies managers deploy and the skills

they apply to facilitate worker learning are not clearly articulated in recent literature or in organisational documents. As the role is unclear, it is also unclear how TAFE NSW, as an organisation, recognises, what they actually do to facilitate worker learning nor how they could be better supported to fulfill their obligations to develop staff capabilities. What is important now is to improve current understanding of the role played by Operations Managers in facilitating informal on-the-job worker learning.

To more effectively understand the role it is proposed that it is important to firstly investigate why managers become involved. Secondly it is important to identify the types of strategies and skills they deploy to facilitate worker learning and thirdly, to explore how the organisation supports managers in this role. The research project proposes to draw these elements together to provide a conceptualisation of the role which could be applied generically in other contexts. A more comprehensive understanding of the actual role, and the influences acting upon this role, would assist organisations to more effectively support line managers to facilitate various forms of informal on-the-job work related learning and to potentially make more valuable contributions to organisational capability development. College Operations Managers, with their broad portfolios and responsibility for the productivity of large numbers of staff are argued in this research project to be capable of making a significant contribution to developing worker and organisational capability in the context of TAFE NSW Colleges.

Overall, there is a present and an emerging need for managers in TAFE NSW to ensure workers adapt to the challenges and demands of the contemporary workplace. Team members need to be confident, alert, aware, and well supported to work efficiently and effectively in the emerging business context and to maintain currency of their skills. To do this, managers will need to be supported by senior management decisions which enable continuous on-the-job learning.

1.3 Focusing the study on the role of College Operations Managers

The focus of this study is the role of a middle to senior level non-teaching manager who is responsible for the management of a broad range of non-teaching operational matters in a large vocational education college in TAFE NSW. The portfolio of an Operations Manager in large colleges includes the management of college administration, technical class support staff, operational finances and human resources, operational services contracts, student associations, college maintenance and environment development, promotions and course information services, college security and in most colleges, childrens' centres and the student association funds and services. In some locations, the Operations Manager's role also includes management of libraries and counselling services.

The primary work of Operations staff employed in vocational education colleges in TAFE NSW, is to support teaching and learning. College Operations Managers need to be competent in understanding the nature of ongoing changes which occur in operating procedures, equipment and technologies used in the various work environments of operations staff. Also they need to be well equipped to manage teams which work in both close physical proximity to their own day-to-day work areas and those whose day-to-day work is located in more remote college buildings, and in some cases in separate parts of the town, suburb or educational precinct. Operations teams are located in, for example, college teaching areas, in administration offices, customer service centers, training workshops, commercial kitchens and restaurants, biomedical science laboratories, hair and beauty salons, gymnasiums, massage therapy studios and simulated commercial business centres such as real estate and travel shops.

As well as managing day-to-day projects and tasks, Operations Managers are responsible for the ongoing day-to-day skills and knowledge development of

their team members. They need to ensure that all staff are provided with training to meet licensing and government legislative requirements for staff to acquire current information in, for example, child protection, cultural awareness, occupational health and safety, electrical testing and machinery drivers licenses are key responsibilities for Operations Managers. The Operations Manager in a large college is an administrator, organiser, coordinator, manager, leader and facilitator of all of the non-teaching delivery operations in colleges.

To illustrate diversity of responsibility in the role of the College Operations Manager, key areas of their responsibilities are shown in Figure 1 below.
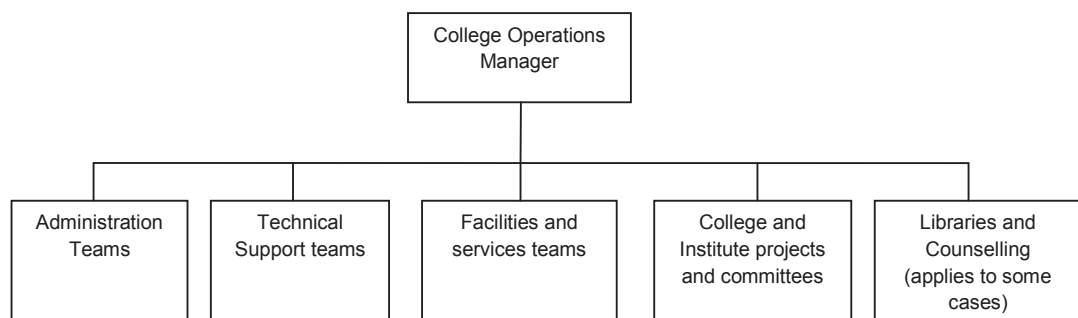
Figure 1: Indicative areas of responsibility for College Operations Managers including the ongoing informal learning of operations workers.

For the purposes of this study located in TAFE NSW colleges, the title Operations Manager includes non-teaching college managers with titles such as College Administration Manager, College Services Manager, College Manager and Campus Director. These positions will be referred to generically as 'Operations Manager'. It is not assumed that the role, structure or influence of the position of the College Operations Manager is similar to management positions in other government or private training organisations. Rather, the position is drawn upon to illustrate the role of one manager in the context of a large government training organisaton. It is proposed that findings from the cases studied may be broadly applicable in other organisational contexts where

line managers have some responsibility for on-the-job worker capability development.

To indicate more specific examples of responsibilities of college Operations Managers, the types of services and the number of staff managed by Operations Managers in a typical large TAFE NSW metropolitan or regional college are summarised in Appendix 1.

This research project is informed by four cases. Each case consists primarily of a college which is located in TAFE NSW. Each case focuses on the role of the Operations Manager in facilitating informal worker learning. In addition, to gather evidence about how the organisation supports managers to develop their facilitative learning skills, the cases also include information gathered from Staff Development Managers who support college staff learning. The case methodology and methods are explained in Chapter 3.

Staff learning and development in TAFE NSW colleges is guided by Institute Staff Development strategies. The main roles of Institute Staff Development Unit Managers are to assist in identifying staff professional development requirements, develop professional learning policies and activities including activities which enable staff to operate effectively in a changing and challenging environment, manage staff learning related budgets, compliance and reporting, and to coordinate the preparation of professional development planners for staff and business units (for example Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2007, 2008). Usually one staff development team provides training services to both teaching and non-teaching staff who work in colleges.

The role of a college Operations Manager was chosen for this research project because the role has significant and critical influence over the day-to-day

provision of services and management of the workplace context with a college. The role therefore, has potential to make a significant contribution to the capability development and ongoing learning of individuals, the capability development of individual workers, Operations teams and, more broadly, the capability of the organisation.

1.4 What is work related and situated learning in this research project?

For the purposes of this research project, informal learning is learning that is acquired in ways other than through participation in formal courses and qualifications offered by educational organisations. As will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this study, informal work related learning is not necessarily a clearly definable or an agreed process or practice. But what is widely acknowledged about the concept of informal learning at work is that it is a process which is often intentional, comprises elements of formality and can be strongly influenced by social connections arising from social interactions between workers in the context of day-to-day work (Billett 2001a; Garrick 1998; Lave & Wenger 1991; Malcolm, Hodkinson & Colley 2003; Marsick & Watkins 1990).

The nature of work related learning referred to in this research, is informal and ongoing worker learning that is largely acquired by workers through participation in work related activities and experiences. It is on-the-job learning which assists workers to develop skills, awareness and knowledges through incremental stages of participation and engagement in everyday work. Work related learning in this research project is a process and an outcome of actions taken by line managers to identify worker learning needs and to put in place strategies to assist and extend ongoing worker learning. In this research project, informal work related learning is referred to as 'work related learning' rather than 'workplace learning'.

The research project proposes that the often used term, 'workplace learning', is inadequate for taking into account the influences of the broader socio-cultural and management context of work. The term is also inadequate in capturing the complex processes of how ongoing and incremental work related experiences and working knowledges are planned and developed for workers. Managers play significant roles in creating and facilitating opportunities and activities for workers to develop ongoing work related knowledges. This type of learning is understood from recent literature, to be enhanced by guided learning strategies and facilitation of concerted developmental social connections at work. The research project proposes that worker learning is not necessarily the responsibility of worker learners and trainers alone, as is so often put forward in learning, training and human resource related literature. Rather, the research project builds on the work of others in acknowledging that informal worker learning is a process and a responsibility which is shared between workers, co-workers, line managers and other organisational partners.

The concept of 'workplace learning' is widely understood in vocational education and in workplaces as a mechanism for learners to gain and build authentic work based skills (Billett 2002, 2004; Chappell 2003). Consequently, the term 'workplace learning' is often taken to incorporate work experience gained through on-the-job learning components of formal vocational course work, such as is required by apprenticeships, traineeships, internships and other vocational and professional learning programs.

Manager facilitation of 'work related learning' is taken to mean the strategies, skills and involvement of managers in planning worker learning and managing conditions and facilities to support worker learning. It is taken to also include strategies to create opportunities for worker participation in activities which have potential to expand worker capabilities and organisational learning. Manager involvement in worker learning in this research project is not intended to include

delivery of formal training nor formal assessment against qualification criteria. But it does include the continual identification of learning needs and the making of arrangements for workers to engage with formal learning programs when appropriate.

The high potential value of informal learning when it is integrated with everyday work is also widely acknowledged in informal work related and organisational learning literature (Poell & Van Woerkom 2011; Watkins & Marsick 1993; Winterton 2002). However, it has also been noted that work and learning can sometimes be difficult to differentiate and this can be both a strength and a weakness for organisations (Poell & Van Woerkom 2011). On-the-job learning can save on training time and costs but this can also mean responsibility for on-the-job learning is transferred to co-workers and managers. This raises questions about preparedness and suitability of those who facilitate such learning. For example, informal on-the-job learning has also been criticised as a mechanism and justification for perpetuating particular ways of organisational thinking and acting and hindering equitable access to learning for some workers and (see Billett 2006; Contu, Grey & Ortenblad 2003; Fenwick 2001; Solomon 2001).

Boud and Garrick (1999) have also noted concerns that the lack of formality in informal learning processes can heighten the risk that learners learn wrong or inappropriate ways of working. Poell and Van Woerkom (2011), too, note that some workplaces may not be sufficiently equipped to create the conditions which foster useful learning at work. They also suggest that if learning is not properly analysed or evaluated learners may be similarly placed at risk of not learning the correct or right ways of working. In a similar vein, inadequate skills and dispositions of managers can also act to impede worker learning (Ellinger & Cseh 2007). Nevertheless, worker learning and the intellectual capital gained from on-the-job learning have been noted as sources of sustainable competitive advantage in contemporary organisations. This brings into focus the need to

nurture informal learning and to foster the establishment of contexts which support on-the-job learning (Garavan et al. 2002). In support of this, there is an important emerging recognition in literature that managers need more support to build their informal learning facilitation skills to make more effective contributions to developing positive learning environments (Bierema & Eraut 2004; Macneil 2001, 2003; Poell & Van Woerkom 2011).

A framework of informal work related learning, rather than management, leadership or organisational studies, for example, has been chosen for this research as it seeks primarily to uncover specific types of strategies and skills managers might use to facilitate ongoing work related learning. A scan of management and leadership related literature was found to provide various ideals and insights into coordinating and combining work and training but lacked the illustration of experiences of actual manager involvement in facilitation of ongoing on-the-job work related learning. It was apparent that work related learning literature would provide more detailed information about ways in which on-the-job work related learning is discussed and currently understood in practices in organisations. The framework of informal work related learning also provides a range of insights into how informal learning might be facilitated as an ongoing, on-the-job process, rather than just managed, led or organized as a management practice. Management and leadership literatures have not altogether been discounted, but rather are drawn upon variously for evidence of how informal work related learning is represented in terms of contemporary management practices.

Through analysis of a holistic case study, the present study will show that managers are committed to identifying worker learning needs and, to providing opportunities to assist workers to continuously learn on-the-job. They are active in managing the social and cultural contexts of work to encourage worker participation in ongoing developmental activities, to address evolving individual and organisational capability requirements. While there are various conditions

which support manager facilitation of informal work related learning, there are also issues which challenge managers in their planning and deployment of strategies. The cases also provide insights into how TAFE NSW as an organisation perceives and views the facilitative learning role of managers.

1.5 Conclusion to Chapter 1 and statement of the research questions

In this chapter, the purpose, aims and objectives of the research, the research argument, and research context have been outlined. This research project recognises that informal learning at work is an integral part of everyday work, in various forms. It is understood as a concept and as a practice in many different ways.

This research project argues organisations need to more efficiently enable workers to not only build their skills and competencies, but also to generate on-the-job work related knowledges to maintain their productivity and relevance in a changing environment. This is important because workers need to be able to maintain ongoing awareness of new ways of working and to work productively and responsively to address continuously changing customer and organisational needs. While much of the informal learning literature points to worker learners as being responsible for their own learning at work, this research project argues that line managers and organisational decision makers also have important roles to play in managing the context of the workplace to foster and optimise ongoing and informal learning for workers.

The study brings together elements of a range of somewhat disaggregated work related learning concepts. It seeks to bring some cohesion to and illustrate what it means for line managers to facilitate ongoing work related learning for others in the context of everyday work and how an organisation supports its managers

in this role. With these issues forming the background and motivations for the study, the research is structured to answer two main research questions.

Two key questions guide this research. The primary research question asks:

 '*What is the actual role of the manager in facilitating informal work related learning?*'

The secondary research question asks:

'*How does the organisation support the manager as a facilitator of informal ongoing work related learning?*'

In asking these questions an opportunity is created to explore two additional subsidiary questions, which ask:

'W*hat motivates, aids and constrains managers to facilitate informal work related learning?*' and

'W*hat might need to continue or change for this role to more effectively contribute to both individual worker learning needs and an organisation's worker capability development goals?*'

1.6 How the thesis chapters are organized

In Chapter 2, insights are drawn from a range of literatures to generate ideas about the facilitation of work related learning. Literature concerning various positions on manager roles are drawn from within human resource development literature including Gibb (2002), Winterton (2002) and Smith (2006) and others. Work related learning is discussed in terms of the theoretical framework of situated learning (Lave & Wenger 1991) to illustrate how the socio-cultural context of the workplace may influence processes of work and learning. Conceptions and practices concerning the ways in which informal work related learning could be provided and facilitated are drawn, for example, from Billett

(2005), Garrick (1998), Evans et al (2006) and Raelin (2000b). Organisational learning and development literature including, for example, Watkins and Marsick (1993), Gustavsson (2009) and (Grugulis 2007) are also drawn upon to provide insights into contemporary thinking about how work related learning could contribute to the wider and longer term capability development of individuals, and of organisations. A brief outline of relevant and current vocational education and training strategies provides background for the potential motivations of managers to be involved in facilitating informal, on-the-job work related learning.

In Chapter 3, case study methodology is discussed to explain how and why interviews and document reviews provide useful information about Operations Manager experiences of facilitating ongoing worker learning and, Staff Development Manager experiences of providing learning opportunities. The rationale for selecting case methodology, the research design, strategy and how cases were selected and analysed, are also described.

Chapter 4 sets out the case findings in three key themes, to illustrate the role and challenges faced by an Operations Manager in facilitating work related learning. An overview of the selected cases, and distinguishing features of each case, are outlined. This is followed by an explanation of how the cases represent the organisation, and how the findings could apply to other organisations.

Chapter 5 begins with answers to the research questions and then goes on to propose a number of recommendations for TAFE NSW, concerning the types of strategies managers could deploy and skills they will need to apply to effectively facilitate informal on-the-job worker learning. A framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing, work related learning, and the development of working knowledges is presented and explained. This is followed by an outline

of an ideal model for successful manager facilitation of work related learning and a number of implications for TAFE NSW, particularly for Institute and college executives who are responsible for planning and supporting staff capability development. Recommendations are also made for how TAFE NSW as an organisation could better acknowledge and support the role of managers and their potential to improve worker capability and productivity.

Chapter 6 draws final conclusions are drawn about what it is that managers actually do to facilitate ongoing, on-the-job, work related learning for others, and how the case study organisation supports managers to carry out this element of their role. Propositions are put forward for managers and for organisations to plan, facilitate and support informal and ongoing work related learning.

CHAPTER 2: LOCATING THE RESEARCH PROJECT IN THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of literature is to locate the study within the broad framework of work related learning. As noted in Chapter 1, the focus of this study is the role of a college Operations Manager as a facilitator of ongoing work related learning for workers in a large contemporary government organisation, that is, a TAFE NSW College. The strategies deployed by managers and the skills they use to facilitate work related learning, are explored through the lenses of work related learning, human resource development and organisational learning. These literatures are also drawn on for insights into how, and what, influences managers in how they go about facilitating ongoing, on-the-job worker learning for capability development purposes. The study is underpinned by principles of situated learning which focus on issues related to the context of work, particularly the socio-cultural, business and physical environment conditions in workplaces. The review of literature identifies and discusses ideas which help to better understand the research problem, and the aims and objectives of the research project.

Five key themes provide insights into current and relevant issues concerning the facilitation of informal work related learning. The first theme provides an overview of why managers become involved in the facilitation of informal work related learning. The second theme identifies the types of informal learning strategies and skills used to facilitate informal work related learning in organisations. The third theme critiques some commonly held views about situated activity and the influence of context on work related learning. The fourth theme identifies some key concepts in organisational learning and the integral role managers play in contributing to organisational capability development. Finally, the fifth theme provides an overview of some current concerns regarding the lack of understanding about, and the need for clarity about, manager roles in facilitating worker learning in contemporary work environments.

The five themes are followed by a brief overview of a number of work related and guided learning models. The sample models are outlined to provide some indication of what others perceive as key conditions for supporting effective informal work related learning. The chapter concludes with an overview of key observations about current issues and concepts concerning facilitation of informal worker learning, and how the involvement of managers is acknowledged and supported in contemporary organisations.

2.1 Theme 1: The involvement of managers in facilitating informal work related learning

The potential involvement of line managers in facilitating work related learning for others is discussed in various ways in a range of literature spanning work-based learning (Billett 2003; Raelin 2008), human resource development (Grugulis 2007; Holland & De Cieri 2006; Smith 2006) and organisational learning (Argote 2005; Argyris & Schon 1996; Marsick & Watkins 1999). Much of this literature outlines the potential roles for managers in coordinating or managing worker and organisational learning. Topics often discussed include identifying worker learning needs, arranging training, and/or assisting individuals and teams through processes such as mentoring, coaching, team work, continuing professional development and ways to transfer knowledge within organisations. Work related learning literature, on the other hand, tends to look more generally at issues facing learners and workplace trainers as they seek to combine work with on-the-job learning. The emphasis in both of these literatures concerns processes or outcomes of learning for individuals or for organisations, whilst tending to down play the perspectives and *actual* practices of managers in facilitating work related learning. The facilitative learning role often appears to be overshadowed by other manager roles such as those associated with, for example, management and leadership, in planning,

coordinating teams, solving problems and performance development. Where work related learning is discussed, there tends to be some emphasis on training and self-directed learning but little focus on the ways in which managers create or maintain the types of conditions and opportunities which support and facilitate individual and organisational learning.

Some human resource and work related learning literature does deal with manager roles in facilitating learning for others (Ellinger, Watkins & Bostrom 1999; Macneil 2003). But these are also often concerned with issues such as the potential implications of manager involvement in worker learning and the ways managers might influence learning. There is little discussion about the actual experiences, motivations or perspectives of managers in their day-to-day facilitation of worker learning. Apart from mentoring and coaching roles, there is also limited empirical evidence of how managers go about planning, deploying strategies or, indeed, applying their own skills to facilitate ongoing on-the-job worker learning. There is almost no discussion about the roles managers play in facilitating on-the-job learning for administrative or technical support workers in educational or more specifically vocational education and training organisations.

The issue of neglect of ongoing professional learning for technical support workers, was recently raised by Lewis and Gospel (2011) in their study of university technicians. They note that technicians, including senior technical support managers, make indispensible contributions to scientific knowledge and to the education of students. Yet their contributions and learning opportunities are often overlooked, in university settings. As a consequence, technicians feel they are the forgotten part of the university workforce, their work is largely taken for granted by academics and training and development opportunities are mostly provided in reactive, *ad hoc* ways. In UK universities, funding rationalisation and staffing reductions mean most technicians are unable to be released from class support or research activities to participate in any programs which are offered (Lewis & Gospel 2011, p. 36). The current context of rapid

change and the potential contribution that managers and their team members could make to both directly and indirectly supporting teaching and learning in schools, colleges and universities, makes this silence surprising.

Similarly, but, anecdotally, well trained and knowledgeable administration and technical support staff in vocational training colleges in NSW are also regarded as mainstays in supporting teaching and learning in colleges. Technical support staff, for example, are expected to maintain the skills currency in the same way as teachers. Administrative staff are expected to manage the operation of new systems and technologies to efficiently support students, teachers and college business interests. Generally, vocational training colleges provide compliance related training and a range of other introductory level skills and awareness building programs suitable for both teachers and non-teaching staff.

However, recent research suggests that in the current environment of continuous change, and moreover, uncertain employment and career futures, teachers and non-teaching staff are likely to need various forms of organisational support so that they can establish themselves in the vocational education and training sector (Simons et al. 2009, p. 10). Further, Simons et al (2009) note that the maintaining and sharing of corporate knowledge is becoming increasingly critical for vocational and training organisations. These processes, they suggest, will require more attention to how, and in what ways, the learning of vocational education and training staff can be more effectively provided.

The present research project continues to add weight to the observation that greater attention from organisational decision makers, to the learning needs of non-teaching staff in vocational training colleges, is now needed to ensure that staff are well equipped to support the teaching and student learning effort. Observations about the valuable roles of non-teaching education support staff together with the realities of ongoing change, the increasing need for cost saving strategies, and for effective ongoing learning and knowledge

development by workers, sets the scene, the problematic and the underpinning rationale for the present research project.

The present literature review is conducted in the light of a tradition where work related learning, organisational learning and human resource development literatures tend to each deal with different aspects of work related learning. For instance, work related learning tends to focus on worker learners and the ways in which they learn on-the-job through formal and structured programs. Organisational learning literature tends to broadly focus on ways in which acquired learning can become embedded in organisational practices and the value to organisations, of this type of learning. Some human resource development literature discusses the need, and increasing demand, for training and other forms of formal or structured learning for workers in organisations (Cooney and Bhartia cited in Holland & De Cieri 2006, p. 98; Smith 2006). There tend to be few concrete links between a manager's role in facilitating informal work related learning for workers, and furthering human resource development and other goals of an organisation. Recent observations that managers are being required to play more prominent roles in assisting worker learning, may start to close this gap.

The focus of this research project is to identify and give some clarity to the role of a manager as a facilitator of work related learning. Literature in the field of management and leadership also variously address aspects of managing learning but these are not dealt with in any detail here. Work related learning practices and trends in human resource development have provided the most relevant background for addressing the research questions. The aim of this review is not to describe how the practice of facilitation of informal work related learning is represented in each genre. Rather, it seeks only to point out that the practice of facilitating on-the-job worker learning draws on a range of concepts embedded variously in each of these fields. The purpose of the review, therefore, is to find links between concepts of work related learning and

organisational learning, and how managers implement strategies to effect learning at work. This will provide the background to a better understanding of what it is that managers actually do to facilitate worker learning in the context of everyday work.

The next three sub-sections consider factors that have served to highlight the need for, and to make more prominent, the role of a manager in facilitating informal work related learning in contemporary organisations.

2.1.1 The changing nature of work and workplaces

Global and national financial decline in the early stages of the 21st century have contributed to significant economic and social stresses for government, industry and business in Australia. The current global and national economic downturn has alerted business, industry and government agencies to the need to change the way they operate. Organisations are now, more than ever before, making adjustments to manage resources in more efficient and sustainable ways and to read and respond more effectively to changing customer demands. Cost saving strategies and lean business philosophies now characterise many Australian business operations. In Australia, the operating environment for many government agencies is subject to the implementation of continuous reforms and consistent reductions in Commonwealth and State government resource allocations. As a result, agencies are now implementing strategies to reduce expenditure, to reduce waste and to encourage more innovative work practices.

Business, industry and individuals are now being urged to take more responsibility for seeking ways to improve productivity, rather than waiting for, and relying on, governments to implement more productive change and regulation (Achterstraat 2011, p. 29). Achterstraat explains that to achieve productivity gains in a changing business environment, individuals need to be

encouraged to invest in themselves, look for ways to streamline activities and develop better understandings of how their own work contributes to the work of the organisation and wider economy. Since the early 1990's and the advent of new technologies and new work practices, organisations have needed to develop more strategic approaches to managing people. Economists, for example, have traditionally viewed investment in education and training as an important factor in explaining differences in international growth rates (Denison 1967 cited in Bratton et al. 2004). The nurturing and valuing of skills and knowledge of workers continues to be prominent in contemporary human resource management and organisational learning literatures, particularly in relation to managing competitive advantage (for example Bratton et al. 2004).

In addition to the effects of the current economic downturn, organisations are also faced with challenges created by an ageing workforce, fast technological development, and the growth of the 'knowledge economy' (Poell & Van Woerkom 2011). The changeable business environment, as Poell and Van Woerkom suggest, is one of the main reasons why organisations need to take better account of their human resources. The ways in which human resources are utilised and developed will become increasingly important in organisations in future years. The Australian government's key education related goals, with respect to its human capital development agenda (Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2012) focus on both improving, among many, health and education outcomes. The intent of the reforms is to develop foundation and technical skills among working Australians, and encourage the further development of skills and knowledge for adaptive, sustainable and productive workforce participation (see also Skills Australia 2011). The need for ongoing work related learning to enable workers to further develop their skills, and knowledge, to keep up with the pace of change, has consensus in a range of other recent literature (Billett 2005; Smith 2006; Winterton 2002).

The quality and quantity of learning and ongoing development at work are generally agreed to be key factors influencing an organisation's ability to adapt to economic, social and organisational change (Cairns & Malloch 2011; Gibb 2002). Professional, specialist and knowledge workers, whose work involves the acquisition and application of knowledge have been subject to major intensification of their work in recent years (Hall 2006). This has added to the need for ongoing learning and support at work. Generalist workers too, are affected by change at work, and similarly need to be supported to take on new organisational ways of working. The premise of most work related learning literature is that all workers have potential to contribute, in some way, to organisational capability development.

The context of continual change has escalated the need for organisations, which aim to maintain their operational efficiency and relevance, to continually adapt to change. A significant contribution can be made to organisational adaptation and learning by optimising, not only the training for workers but also in finding ways to create authentic, integrated learning and work opportunities. Workplace change, coupled with concerns about some ambiguities in continuous professional learning, is driving a need for developing a better understanding of authentic professional learning for workers (Webster-Wright 2009). In recent years, competition for access to Commonwealth and State government funds has been steadily increasing. To compensate for possible future reductions in government funding and increases in training market competition, TAFE NSW Institutes are implementing new strategies to develop commercial business models of operation to establish alternative sources of revenue (for example, Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2009b).

An important priority, now, is for government agencies such as TAFE NSW to build business acumen, business awareness and organisational knowledge among workers, so that their potential to contribute to commercial and customer demands is maximised. Hall (2006, p. 7) supports this with his observation that

the imposition of business models in public and community sectors has, in effect, forced agencies to act and manage their workers in ways that are consistent with private sector, for-profit organisations. However, cost saving strategies in competitive environments often result in reductions in spending on training and development. But, importantly, this also creates a demand for alternative methods of cost efficient, on-the-job training and informal and facilitated learning strategies.

Further, an important implication of the economic and technological changes taking place in contemporary workplaces is the need for workers to maintain and develop skills currency and ongoing work related knowledges about the goals and objectives of their organisations. They need these skills and knowledges to maintain awareness and competence and to adapt and operate quickly and efficiently. However, Bratton et al (2004) caution, that hard markets characterised by downsizing and cost saving strategies, can increase worker insecurities and disengage some workers from commitments to upgrading their skills and knowledge. Similarly, Cairns and Malloch (2011, p. 11) note that the workplace itself can create a narrowing of learning and work opportunities and this can have the effect of locking workers into specific strands of learning. Nevertheless, learning at the individual worker and team level is thought to be the best form of competitive advantage and a point of difference for organisations (Ellinger, Watkins & Bostrom 1999; Garavan et al. 2002). As Bratton et al suggest, managers need to create work structures and cultures which are conducive to continuous work-based learning, if they are to ensure returns on investment.

A knowledgeable workforce however, cannot be attributed to training and development alone. An effective knowledgeable workforce will need to continuously participate in learning activities and effectively apply skills and knowledge gained through informal learning means. Additionally, a sustainable learning workforce needs to have 'buy-in' to developmental strategies and be

supported to develop their understanding and awareness about the directions and goals of the organisation. Workforces have been found to be most effectively supported where managers willingly nurture and support active learning. Managers achieve this through developing worker understanding of organisational objectives and encouraging active formation and participation in diverse social networks, including networks with external contacts (Fenwick 2007; Grugulis 2007).

However, while the placement of responsibilities for training and learning in the hands of individual line managers might save costs, manager involvement in worker learning can also be a potential risk to equitable distribution of learning opportunities, access to experts and guidance in appropriate circumstances (Billett 2006; Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm 2002; Fenwick 2007; Watson & Maxwell 2007). These types of issues and risks, suggest a need for careful consideration by senior managers and organisational decision makers, if manager driven facilitation of worker learning is to operate in effective and efficient ways.

2.1.2 A trend towards a shift in responsibility for worker learning

Accompanying the growing realisation of the importance of on-the-job learning, and the need to address new demands created by economic change, organisations are beginning to shift some responsibility for on-the-job learning away from training units to become an additional responsibility for line managers (Bierema & Eraut 2004; Smith 2006). Similarly, Billett (2001a, p. 103) notes an increasing trend for co-workers in particular, to become involved in assisting others to learn on-the-job. Such strategies in both Australia and the United Kingdom (UK) have had the effect of driving line managers to accept not only the additional role of trainer, but also to accept responsibility for training and development where previously, separate training units would have assumed this cost, effort and responsibility (Smith 2006). Smith's focus is,

however, on delivery of workplace training rather than facilitation of work related learning. Nevertheless, the 'transfer' of responsibility, in full or in part, to line managers and workers raises some questions about manager preparedness and capacity to effectively manage these new expectations. There are concerns also that while managers are increasingly expected to be involved in assisting worker learning, recent studies indicate they rarely receive any training or guidance for this role (Bierema & Eraut 2004, p. 58).

A problem for managers, and for organisations, concerning this new trend is that organisations as whole entities may not be ready to acknowledge the range and types of informal learning that are understood to support ongoing work related development. In addition to this, organisations have been deficient in forming policy goals to develop informal learning strategies (Hager 2005, p. 830). It is not always clear why this is the case but a general lack of understanding of informal learning as a valid way to develop worker capabilities could be one reason. Another reason could be an overall lack of understanding about what is meant by, or what counts, as informal learning in workplaces.

Concerns have also been raised about the intentions and motivations for learning in organisations. For example, there are contentions about whose interests are really being served by strategies designed to support worker learning. On the one hand it is not difficult to find work related learning literature which emphasises accessible and positive learning outcomes for individual worker learners. Other literature however, suggests that in the current environment of organisational downsizing, and cost savings, strategies which advocate self-directed learning and organisational learning are closely linked to market economics and financial interests of organisations. Some suggest that working conditions such as flexible working hours, performance management and encouragement of self directed learning are really just organisational 'code' for workers to work harder and longer for little additional reward (Garrick 1998, p. 8). Similarly, Hennessy and Sawchuck (2003) suggest much work related learning in organisations is, in practice, the result of learners taking action to cope with ongoing workplace change. Garrick (Garrick 1998) points out also,

that there are implications for how workplace learning is structured, how managers might be supported, and how they might be recognised and remunerated for carrying out these roles.

Nonetheless, the potentially important role played by managers in facilitating and supporting worker learning is noted in a range of workplace learning, human resource and management related literature (Billett 2001a; Boud & Middleton 2003; Ellinger & Cseh 2007; Livingstone & Sawchuck 2004). More specifically the need to develop a better understanding of how co-workers contribute to informal worker learning, and the role of managers in supporting this type of learning, has also begun to be more overtly acknowledged in recent work related learning literature (Billett 2003; Evans et al. 2006; Li et al. 2009).

Likewise, organisational and informal work related learning literature indicates an increasing expectation in contemporary organisations for managers to understand the practical dimensions of workplace learning and to acquire and deploy a wide range of skills to facilitate work related learning (Boud & Garrick 1999; Raelin 2000b; Watkins & Marsick 1993). An important skill for managers, particularly to achieve competitive advantage, is to be able to identify and then deploy strategies to coordinate the building of knowledges and complementary capabilities among workers (Bratton et al. 2004). Hamel (2000 cited in Bratton et al 2004) also suggests that an organisation's ability to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple technologies will be a core competence in the new work environment. Similarly, there are indications in recent human resource related literature which suggest managers increasingly need to be actively involved in managing workplace contexts to optimise learning (Coertzer 2007 cited in Ellinger et al. 2011, p. 72). Sambrook (2004), however, questions the appropriateness of manager involvement in worker learning, and further, asks what lies behind the dominant imagery, icons and ideas associated with developing human resources in organisations?

Taking a holistic organisational view of work related learning, Macneil (2001) asserts that organisations cannot adequately capture learning, or the benefits that could flow from individual learning experiences, if learning remains a fragmented process and is embedded only in individuals. For Macneil it is the role of the manager as a facilitator of worker learning which is critical in providing the link between individuals and the goals of the organisation and in facilitating the sharing of knowledges between workers. Macneil (2001, p. 251) specifically notes that one way to support informal learning at work will be to facilitate continuous team learning and the sharing of such learning between members. Important also is Eraut's (1998 cited in Garavan et al. 2002, p. 61) observation that competent workers will be those who participate in a range of formal and informal learning activities across their working careers. There is a role for managers to assist such learning and to contribute to ongoing worker competence.

Recent trends indicating increases in organisational expectations for managers to facilitate worker learning, raise questions about what motivates organisations and managers to become involved in facilitating on-the-job worker learning. Questions have also been asked about whether or not, managers and co-workers are adequately equipped and supported to effectively carry out informal and ongoing learning roles.

There has been extensive discussion about vocational learners, and workplace learning and training practices in literature since the late 1980s, through the 90s to now. The actions and strategies deployed by line managers to assist workers to develop productive on-the-job work related knowledges, however, continue to be relatively under-theorised when compared to some other management practices such as leading, organising and managing teams. The need for managers to take on more responsibility for fostering, guiding and supporting informal worker learning is now widely recognised. But what do managers actually do to facilitate work related learning, and how well equipped and supported are they, to carry out this role? Further, questions arise for organisations about how managers decide who will be allowed access to

learning opportunities and how resources are allocated to support ongoing worker learning. Understanding organisational and individual worker learning needs and navigating continuously changing workplace contexts suggest the facilitative learning process is a complex one, and one which requires some specific strategies and skills for it to work well.

2.1.3 Contentious issues in manager facilitation of worker learning

Manager involvement in facilitating work related learning has been noted as a difficult process for both managers and workers (Hennessy & Sawchuck 2003; Hughes 2004; Solomon 2001). Competing priorities of business efficiencies, return on investment, and developing and retaining staff, can potentially create tensions for managers in achieving production targets. In most circumstances, productivity and on-the-job learning would be considered by managers to go hand-in-hand. But in other circumstances, utilising resources to create and provide on-the-job learning opportunities could be untenable, or unsustainable. Informal learning as an outcome for those who participate cannot be assumed, nor can assumptions be made that all workers will engage with opportunities provided.

The actual practice of a manager having the role of both manager and learning facilitator has also been found to be particularly problematic for workers. Hughes (2004) in his study investigating the role of supervisors as learning facilitators found that workers can be significantly concerned about identifying as learners at work. Hughes suggests that workers seeking or accepting assistance from a supervisor or manager could be construed as admitting some level of incompetence at work. Workers he found, are far more likely to seek assistance from co-workers to 'save face' with their supervisors. Hughes (2004, p. 285) concluded also that, overall, supervisors actually have a surprising lack of direct involvement in worker learning. As such, managers are unlikely to be able to sustain a direct, personal or facilitative role in relation to the learning

processes of workers. Workplace supervisors, in Hughes's study did, however, have a significant influence on the shaping of worker learning by creating a learning conducive environment. Hughes concluded that it is the indirect effects of managers' supervisory actions, such as setting expectations, providing feedback and managing accountability, which have a more significant effect on individual worker learning.

However, taking a slightly different view, Collin and Valleala (2005) suggest that what is important in the current context of learning at work is not necessarily how individuals learn but, rather, how learning is achieved through participation in joint team practices. In their study of programs for youth workers, they find that social networks and collective problem solving are the most important sources of support and new knowledge for learners. They conclude that a sense of community is an important influence on work performance and learning, yet this aspect of learning remains an obscure area and one which tends to be unrelated to other dimensions of work.

Some time ago, Solomon (Boud & Garrick 1999) suggested that in workplaces oriented to more specialised and customer focused services, the language of specialisation, team work, participatory practices and collaborative decision making, all threaten notions of norms and normality. Diverse skills and knowledges are usually recognised as valuable, but the culture of some workplaces can promote particular ways of thinking and working, and this may not necessarily promote independent or diverse ways of operating. Such concerns will continue as the need for specialisation and collaborative social practices will be likely to continue to grow in contemporary public organisations.

Similarly, the identification and equitable distribution of developmental opportunities for workers can be problematic for both workers and organisations. For example, the ideals, views, perceptions and objectives of line

managers can significantly influence the ways opportunities are offered, and this can result in unequal and unsatisfactory experiences for some learners (Billett 2006, p. 119). This is illustrated in a study of manager roles to improve team independence in a Swedish public agency (Gustavsson 2009). This study uncovered an underlying fear among a group of managers which adversely affected how learning opportunities could have been offered to workers. In this study, managers deliberately avoided initiating learning opportunities for workers, for fear of potentially disrupting workers, at a time when many other changes had been set in place, and, at a time when, arguably, workers most needed to extend their skills and experiences to navigate the impending workplace change.

The nature of work itself, can also act to hinder ongoing informal work related learning. Ellinger and Cseh's (2007) study of manager and co-worker involvement in workplace learning, found that worker learning is made more difficult by poor employee attitude towards learning at work, the fast pace of change and the increase in workloads caused by this change. There was an overall perception that there is little time for planning or engaging workers in on-the-job learning activities. Also, as role models and providers of opportunities for learning through work, managers can influence the learning culture of an organisation through their own actions and values (Ellinger & Cseh 2007). This brings another layer of complexity to the role of a manager as a facilitator of work related learning. Further, Sambrook (2004) points out that production efficiency and human resource development strategies can be contradictory for employers and employees. The time required to identify worker learning needs, allocate time and resources to training and learning, and possible unpredictable outcomes from learning, often do not fit well with the need for quick, standardised and efficient productivity and service provision.

There are, however, suggestions in the literature that workplaces can be places of unequal distribution of opportunities for ongoing and further learning. Age,

education and judgments by managers about worker competence, for example, can influence how workers are invited to participate in learning activities. Older workers, can be overlooked for younger or better educated workers (Brunello & Medio, 2001 cited in Billett, 2010, p.69).The issue of discrimination on the basis of gender and culture in workplaces is also prominent in recent literatures (Bernhardt, Morris, Handcock & Scott, 1998 cited in Billett, 2010, p.69). Further, power structures and divisions of labour, can also influence worker access to learning opportunities (Fenwick 2006a).

Similarly, difficulties can also arise for managers and workers when training and learning strategies are driven solely by oganisational goals (Billett 2010). This occurs when individual learning needs are overlooked in favour of driving a particular way of working to achieve specific goal or objective. Under these circumstances workers and managers have little influence in guiding any learning agenda which might be put in place by the parent organisation. Given the possible hindrances and, to meet changing circumstances in organisations, worker learners need to continually negotiate and re-negotiate their participation in work and in learning new practices (Billett 2010). But as Billett suggests worker capacity to negotiate and participate to maintain currency of vocational knowledge will depend on the experiences and support they receive through their work practice. The ability of the manager to effectively understand the learning needs of workers and to guide learning is therefore critical for managers and workers. To add to concerns, and as noted elsewhere in this review, organisations often assume that managers are adequately equipped to guide on-the-job learning through everyday work in meaningful and useful ways. The possibility that managers may need support in this area is often overlooked in literature (Peterson and Little 2005 cited in Ellinger et al. 2011, p. 72). One possible reason why support for managers has attracted little attention in the past is that on-the-job learning has often been closely associated with formal training. Training has been delivered by accredited teachers and trainers. The concept of facilitating on-the-job learning by managers, who are not employed

as accredited trainers, has not been widely acknowledged or recognised in literature or actively sought as a workplace management practice.

In the next section, facilitative interventions used by managers in developing and supporting opportunities for ongoing, on-the-job worker learning are discussed.

2.2 Theme 2: Informal learning strategies applied in organisations

A scan of work-based learning facilitation and adult learning literature suggests ongoing worker learning can be significantly enhanced by a facilitator applying a wide range of facilitative learning skills and strategies in the workplace (Burns 2002; Hogan 2002; Raelin 2000b, 2008). The following discussion outlines examples of some of the main principles and key practices which characterise facilitated learning in contemporary organisations.

2.2.1 Underpinning principles of facilitating informal worker learning

Facilitation takes many forms and is used for a number of purposes in workplaces. Facilitation often includes practices such as assisting and guiding individuals and groups to solve problems, manage change and learn how to learn. The facilitative learning approaches, such as those put forward by Spinks and Clements (1993), Heron (1993) and Lizio, Stokes and Wilson (2005) all emphasise benefits of learner centered frameworks of facilitation in organisations. In most contexts, facilitation takes as its central tenet the process of assisting others 'to make something easy' or to manage a process, but not necessarily to design and deliver a learning program (Raelin 2008).

A generally agreed principle in facilitation literature, is for a facilitator to focus strategies on the experience, needs and activities of the learner (Heron 1993; Hogan 2002; Spinks & Clements 1993). Facilitative learning strategies noted in work related learning and management literature build on these principles, similarly noting that facilitative activities include for example, group problem solving, bridging gaps in understanding, goal setting, team building and developing interpersonal communication skills. A skilled facilitator develops and deploys a range of skills to assist the learning of others. Spinks and Clements emphasise a systematic approach where facilitation practice includes the setting of aims, objectives, goals and a clear structure to create a partnership between him or herself and the learner. These practices emphasise the facilitator's role as one which ensures that the facilitation process is relevant, significant, meaningful, challenging, purposeful, responsive and, importantly, learner centered.

Another principle in facilitating learning is that a facilitator assists learners to build bridges between worker's everyday work and the goals of the organisation. Their role assists workers to interpret and understand the work they do, and to understand the impact of their work on the organisation. A successful approach to facilitation takes several stages. A first step is to develop an understanding of individual learners, and to take account of the 'whole person', that is, the physical, social, perceptual and political person (Heron 1993, p. 17; Spinks & Clements 1993). This is followed with preparing learners to realistically deal with their own potential problems arising from the work environment. Facilitators apply both individual and group learning strategies which can include strategies which allow learners to reflect and self-direct their learning (Heron 1993). Practical applications such as field work, projects, learning from peers, and use of supported learning contracts to ground learning in experience, are also widely used by facilitators. Materials which support self-paced leaning and monitoring are also used to back up facilitative learning strategies. It is generally agreed that facilitation activities for the

purpose of supporting formal learning are geared to the achievement of formal, usually academic, outcomes within specified timeframes. But, facilitation activities supporting informal learning are oriented to learners achieving informal outcomes such as new experiences, knowledge and skills.

Clearly, effective learning facilitation starts with strategies to shape the development of learners and maintain their engagement. This requires careful selection of strategies, timing and appreciation for the location and context of learning (Raelin 2000a). Other facilitative work-based learning interventions emphasise the creation of conditions which range from providing advice and offering leads, to directly challenging assumptions, providing structures to encourage problem solving and demonstrating care and attention for the learner and the learning process (Raelin 2008, p. 190). Facilitation in a work-based learning context encourages learners, particularly groups of learners, to move through stages of engagement and participation, in order that they develop effective collaborative practices. Importantly, facilitating managers need to be able to adapt their styles of facilitation and apply different combinations of supportive behaviours to address different learner needs and circumstances. The role of a facilitator is a sensitive one, which requires careful decisions about offering direction, and when, and how to apply appropriate discretion (Raelin 2000a). Importantly, particularly in light of this research project, Raelin, also cautions that work based learning can become a flawed process if learners are not provided with adequate opportunities to practice what they have learned. This can occur particularly when there is little time, few resources, a lack of interest among managers and others involved in the way work is organised, and when there is little relevance to organisational strategies.

However, facilitation of informal worker learning tends to be overshadowed by formal learning programs and continues to be a less well recognised form of learning. Perhaps, this may be attributed to the lack of structure and absence of academically recognised outcomes compared to outcomes from formal course work. Nevertheless, it is argued in this research project that considerate attention by managers to creating ongoing, on-the-job informal developmental

learning opportunities has potential to assist workers to learn, in a range of ways. Further, ongoing learning and experience of team members can make significant contributions to overall organisational capability development goals. In the context of everyday work, it is workers' skills and knowledges which are ultimately applied to achieve service targets and production goals. Managers play critical roles in initiating and supporting workers to learn efficiently and effectively on-the-job.

2.2.2 An overview of informal guided learning strategies

Guided learning is another form of facilitated learning. In examining the concept of guided learning at work, Billett (2000, 2001b) suggests that workplaces can offer a range of ways to guide the learning of workers. These guidances, or affordances, include how the workplace supports and motivates workers to engage in developmental activities. Workplace affordances are explained by Billett (2010) as the conditions, affiliations and practices of the workplace which enable or disable access to opportunities for ongoing learning. The ways in which learning can be guided include, for example, setting up supportive conditions such as providing mentoring, coaching and professional discussions, addressing skills gaps, creating opportunities for new experiences and encouraging participation in new challenges.

Various ideas about informal work related learning and facilitation practices, emanating largely from contemporary work related learning literatures, are consolidated in Table 1 below. The intended outcomes and ways in which learning is facilitated strongly suggest managers need to be closely involved with the development and ongoing implementation of worker learning strategies.

Table 1: Types of facilitation strategies in contemporary informal work related learning literature

Type of learning intended	Ways in which informal learning is facilitated
Acquiring individual and organisational capability	Mentoring Coaching / or understudying Assisting and guiding Group and team work Self-directed learning Developmental conversations Identification of skill gaps Selection and distribution of appropriate tasks Setting of challenges to meet individual needs Informal training programs
Learning in, and from, the social network	Setting up and maintaining opportunities and conditions which support ongoing social connections, and informal social networking. Fostering communities of practice
Attaining compliance and quality assurance	Informal training programs Direct participation in compliance related activities
Acquiring and observing good practices and behaviours	Modelling from managers and others

Details in Table 1 have been sourced from various contemporary work related learning literature, including, for example Watkins and Marsick (1993), Boud and Garrick (1999), Lewis (2000), Billett (2003, 2004), Raelin (2008).

The types of facilitation strategies listed indicate that for many learning purposes, the involvement of others is significant. Mentoring, coaching, modelling and guiding practices require the willingness and resources of

experts and others to establish and coordinate processes and suitable practices.

At the same time adult learning and work related learning literature also suggests that learning at work relies heavily on the motivation, interests and willingness of individual learners to engage with learning related activities. Adult educators, too, often actively foster self-directed learning and in finding new ways to allow more control and autonomy for learners (Foley 2000, p. 47). As the literature suggests there are various intentions and reasons for facilitating work related learning. The examples listed suggest that informal learning is assisted by not only the deployment of strategies and application of skills by managers but also by the participation and motivations of individual learners.

The types of learning required and intended, and the types of facilitation strategies discussed in literature suggest that managers themselves, need to be skilled in guiding workers to take risks and challenges, to assist workers to plan and stage their learning and to help workers to work competently, collaboratively and compliantly. Creating conditions which support workers to work and interact effectively in the context of work is emphasised. Most of the strategies require direct input from managers themselves and hence, there is a strong sense of reliance on workplace managers to facilitate the informal learning required.

In guided learning relationships, communication and competent planning and organisational management skills are key competencies for facilitators. Facilitators listen carefully, speak clearly, empathise, negotiate, give and receive feedback, encourage learners to reflect and challenge assumptions, model, and, convincingly, guide others (Raelin 2008, p. 187). The formation of comfortable relationships and interest in personal and professional matters are widely considered key communication skills for managers in planning and

facilitating learning for others. Essentially, a good facilitator is able to allocate adequate time to learners, give and receive feedback, provide guidance and advice, accept a range of situations, and extend and challenge learners (McDermott 1996 and Bell 2002 cited in Raelin 2008, p. 179).

2.2.3 The role of a manager as a learning facilitator

It is argued in this research project, that it is managers who can best support the forms of learning which enable workers to engage, think, feel, act and make appropriate decisions. Beckett (1999, p. 87) refers to these forms of learning as organic learning. That is, learning which is integrated into everyday work, and which helps to answer three main questions 'What are we doing'?, 'Why are we doing it'? and 'What comes next'? Beckett suggests that it is workplace middle level managers who are best placed in organisations to bring together workers and relevant learning related activities to facilitate the type of learning that is needed in contemporary organisations. It is managers who provide the structures and types of guidance for workers to operationalise and create meaning in worker learning.

Beckett (1999, p. 92) suggests managers can support learning in organisations by modelling learning, implementing policies which make experiences tangible, encouraging peer collaboration, creating amenable conditions and enabling workers to make clear links between work and what they are learning. However, it is important to point out that learning at and in the context of work is not an aspiration for all workers. It is always going to be a possibility that some workers will not want to be involved in learning new ways of working. It is also highly likely that some workers will be willing, and successful, in learning many new ways of working but reluctant, for a range of reasons, to share what they have learned with others. A lack of confidence, limited time, protecting their jobs and inadequate opportunities can inhibit work related learning. Managers may take on the role of learning facilitator and optimise opportunities for worker learning, but there can be no guarantee that workers will adequately engage or that

learning will be an outcome of the facilitation practice. Understanding what inhibits learning at work is an important aspect to understanding work related learning. But, how and in what ways, work related learning is inhibited in contemporary workplaces is often only scantly dealt with in work related learning literature.

Managers, who take on roles in facilitating worker learning, create and promote learning environments, broaden worker perspectives, communicate expectations, engage and solve problems with others (Ellinger, Watkins & Bostrom 1999, p. 115). This list of skills and abilities alone, implies that guided learning strategies are complex processes involving extensive planning and support for learning as a process. Managers, clearly, need to successfully apply, and demonstrate, high levels of confidence, competence and experience to navigate and facilitate guided learning in various contexts. Two of the best known and widely practiced facilitative learning strategies are mentoring and coaching (Hawkins & Smith 2006; Johnson & Ridley 2004; Lewis 2000; Raelin 2008). They are frequently viewed as relatively cost effective ways to both develop staff, and to maintain productive capacities within organisations.

Along with learning from managers and peers, mentoring is thought to be one of three of the most effective forms of learning in workplaces for improving performance, and satisfaction among participants (Clutterbuck, 1995 cited in Lewis, 2000, p.8). The key processes in mentoring and coaching relationships are advice, counsel, support and sharing knowledge (Johnson & Ridley 2004) and considered critical managerial competencies for managers (Raelin 2008, p. 173). However, poor learning outcomes from mentoring and coaching relationships can result if unnecessary controls and unequal power relationships exist. Also, if managers confuse their line management roles and mentoring roles, the engagement of workers and mentees with learning processes can be similarly confusing. However, Lewis also notes, that while the issue of line managers acting as mentors can be problematic, managers can be effective

natural mentors with learners, potentially, having much to gain from line managers in a good mentoring relationship.

Attending to the needs of individuals rates highly as a key quality for those who facilitate the learning of others (Raelin 2008, p. 187). But identifying and addressing the needs of individuals can be an intensive process requiring much time, energy and resources on the part of both managers and the organisation as a whole. Similarly, the benefits for managers who take on these resource absorbing, guided learning processes, may manifest in improved worker productivity but the costs can also be significant for managers and organisations. As Billett (2003) notes in his study of mentoring in a large manufacturing plant, mentors are aware of the potential benefits to mentees. But the lack of time, some negativity from learners and an overall insufficient acknowledgement of the role by the organisation made the role of mentor challenging.

Mentors can also risk the exploitation of their knowledge and skills by mentees when there is no specific contract or agreement about the outcomes of their roles as mentors. Billett (2003, p. 106) notes that in some Japanese companies, mentoring is an acknowledged and remunerated role mentors are protected from possible job displacement by mentees. But such arrangements are unlikely to exist in many other organisations. These types of issues and challenges raise questions about the appropriateness of managers acting as mentors and coaches to facilitate informal work related learning for others.

In the next section, the influence of the context of work is explored to uncover how context affects work related learning.

2.3 Theme 3: The influence of context on learning at, and through, work

The context of the workplace is widely accepted as having a significant influence on how learning at work is afforded to workers and how workers participate and engage in learning related activity (Billett 2006; Boud & Middleton 2003; Evans et al. 2006; Fenwick 2001; Solomon 2001). Broadly, the type of conditions which support work related learning include those which invite workers to learn. Opportunities for worker participation in work and challenging tasks, authentic work, supportive social connections and contact with management, are all documented as supportive worker learning conditions.

2.3.1 The concept of situated work related learning

The concept of situated learning emanates from situated activity. It is based on the idea that knowledge is influenced by the activity, context and culture in which it is used. Situated learning is the promotion of the ability of learners to look for, recognise, evaluate and use information, particularly contextual resources, to learn productively (Brown, Collins and Duguid cited in McLellan 1996, p. 118). Further, and although taken from an example of a teacher-student interaction, the act of guiding and scaffolding learning in a contextually generative activity has been effective in guiding the transfer of knowledge from more familiar contexts to less familiar contexts (Rogoff and Gardner 1984 cited in McLellan 1996, p. 118). Learners, in a situated learning environment, might be novices, experts and others, but they all engage in various ways in activities that are embedded in the context, and within the culture of the work setting. The key components of a situated learning model call attention to the use of authentic contexts, access to coaching and the provision of opportunities for learners to practice and articulate what they have learned. Further, a situated learning model emphasises the value and need for social interactions between worker learners and between learners and their environment.

A situated learning environment also encourages the use of reflection, storytelling, and the use of technologies to support learning. Stories play important roles in the transfer and construction of knowledge, and for storing, linking and remembering (Bateson,1994, Hasselbring 1992, Honan 1990, Norman 1993 and others cited in McLellan 1996). Reflection is also a useful strategy for learners to complement existing experience. Reflective practices are generally accepted as enabling learners to make connections and associations between new and existing knowledge. It enables learners to validate, integrate and appropriate learning in, and from, every-day work (Boud & Walker 1991, p. 20) . The encouragement of reflective learning strategies, and the making of time and places in which learners can take action to learn from experience, is an important skill for facilitative learning practitioners (Nyhan 1991, p. 28; Raelin 2008). However, as Boud and Walker (1997, p. 7) found, there are many barriers which block learner ability to reflect rationally and learn from experience. Examples include past negative experience, a lack of confidence, time, and support from others, hostile contexts and external pressures and demands. To facilitate a supportive learning environment is both a skill, and a strategy, which is growing in importance for managers in contemporary organisations, particularly where change is constant and worker experience is a critical commodity.

Another key component of a context rich, situated learning environment, is learning which results from collaborative relationships between co-workers (Billett 2003; Eraut 2004; Evans et al. 2006). Critical early steps for managers to effectively initiate and manage collaborative relationships are to understand the motivations, dispositions and interactions between worker learners. Similarly, managers can support worker learning by developing policies which acknowledge the importance of worker development, by articulating expectations for ongoing learning and effectively managing the work environment so as to enable workers to work and learn with others in the context of everyday work (Beckett 1999, p. 92). Individuals are active agents in what, and how, they learn (Billett 2001b, p. 211). But managers also need to be

able to understand how individuals and groups work together to maximise opportunities to learn with, and from, each other. Importantly, optimal collaboration in work requires workers to work effectively in groups and teams, to communicate efficiently and be able to adapt and work within an often highly socialised environment.

Overall, much of the work related learning literature reviewed as part of this research project, makes a strong case for the need to establish collaborative practices between workers and their co-workers and to sustain productive and developmental social working relationships. Manager understanding of these propensities will be important, if they are to make an effective contribution to the broader matter of developing ongoing worker capabilities and translate this into organisational learning. To navigate the changing workplace context and to enable workers to create multiple identities, in multiple networks, will be key challenges for managers in contemporary organisations.

2.3.2 Practice communities as informal learning mechanisms

Building on the concept of learning through collaborative relationships, Lave and Wenger's (1991, p. 35) concept of communities of practice advocates learning in and through participation in social practice. They present learning in communities of practice as an apprenticeship model of learning, where learners are guided by community members, particularly, experts or others who have taken on the role of 'guide'. Learners progress within a community of practice, from a status of novice, or 'peripheral participant', to full 'expert' participant in a community of practice. This is the distinguishing feature of their framework. The progression framework embodies the idea that learners enter a community of practice as peripheral novice 'new-comers', and develop skills under an apprenticeship or guided relationship with an expert, to become a fully participating expert 'old hand'.

Legitimate peripheral participation emphasises the developmental character of communities of practice, where the changing knowledge, skill and discourse of participants become part of developing an identity within a practice community (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 122). Identity, they maintain, is closely linked to motivation. In order to enhance engagement, participation in, and learning through communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991, p.98) accentuate the importance of understanding not only community structures and the activity system itself, but also that it is imperative to understand individual interests, and motivations and the nature of social relations between learners and others. The social structure, the power relations and the conditions which determine legitimacy and access to participation are critical in defining possibilities for learning. In this context rich situated learning model, Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 50) suggest that learning as participation is an evolving, and continuously renewing, set of relations in learning. Sustained learning, they maintain, is achieved by the continual generation of knowledge, and the subsequent regeneration of communities of practice.

A community of practice is both a concept and an organisation of members which has the potential to attract multiple stakeholders. New learners, experts, peers and others can all become members. This creates a diverse array of relationships, around which different perspectives, knowledges and skills may circulate. The concept of a community of practice holds that learners acquire skills, knowledge and experience through both direct immersion in the connections they make with others, and from the physical and cultural environment (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 101). Lave and Wenger's initial concept of learning in communities of practice was centered on creating a supportive and guided environment for learners. Later, Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice centres on learning as a process of participation where group members are mutually engaged, sharing interests, solving problems, and in sharing their knowledge, expertise, meanings and ways of working. If organisations are to make the most of communities of practice, they need to

recognise the value of members, particularly members who are able to navigate community boundaries and optimise participation and innovation (Wenger 1998, p. 255). The rapidly evolving contexts of workplaces suggests that the next steps for practice communities will be to contribute to the continuous development and adaptability of workers so that they are well equipped to share knowledge and work in efficient and sustainable ways.

Critical for learners to become full members of practice communities, is that they are able to access a wide range of ongoing activities, information, resources, opportunities and have equitable access to experts. Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger 1991) see communities of practice as providing a foundation for sustaining the learning of members through active community participation. But they also see difficulties arising from the socio-cultural organisation of practice communities. In particular, they point out that risks occur when there are competing interests, conflicts, different meanings and interpretations made by members within communities (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 56). These risks, could potentially be heightened if there is no central point of organisation, guidance or leadership within a community of practice. The role of a manager in reducing conflicts and smoothing competing interests could enhance the operation of a community of practice. However, this is not to say that competing interests, meanings and interpretations are not valuable in learning. Rather, a community of practice does need to consider how problems can be effectively mitigated if community forms of learning are pursued.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), later emphasise the value of actively cultivating and supporting communities of practice so that they can support learning in organisations. It is the nurturing of useful and productive participation, and maintaining learning conducive contexts in workplaces which has the potential to sustain effective learning in organisations. However, if communities of practice need cultivation and nurturing in organisations, as emphasised by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) then this suggests that

the framework needs continuous action and ongoing rejuvenation to engage workers, and others, particularly reluctant workers. The ways in which managers manage the context of the workplace to create supportive learning conditions and their ability to recognise and manage the type of competing influences which arise within practice communities, are central to the interests of this research project. It is the engagement and valuing of participation, and the investment in enabling social connections to form, which are vital to organisational competence. However, as Wenger (1998, p. 253) suggests, communities of practice and their strength in establishing social cohesion among workers can be an asset to organisations. But they are often not formally recognised or nurtured and this informality of their existence means they are a potential resource which can also be easily discounted and overlooked in organisations.

To better position communities of practice within an organisation, and to bring them into better view, Wenger (1998) suggests communities of practice need to be aligned with other institutionalised 'constellations' of practices. This means, broadly, aligning the community's practices with the aims and objectives of the wider organisation. This might include aligning to other organisational units, coordinating services for customers, improving production, sharing tips, styles and expanding competence and sharing knowledge. This then allows an organisation to do two things: to pay attention to what is needed to resource and support communities of practice, and allow community members to better understand their roles within the wider organisation (Wenger 1998, p. 258). To activate these processes, organisations clearly need to carefully consider how to cultivate and support communities of practice to form and operate.

Senior managers also need to know how managers maintain relevance for members and the wider organisation. One of the most influential and sustaining aspects of the concept of communities of practice is that they are proposed to support ongoing learning, by enabling the formation of socialised working

relationships, based on productive and meaningful activities. These are important considerations for line managers tasked with, or interested in fostering the formation and effective operation of communities of practice in workplaces. It is the development of productive relationships which constitute the backbone of effectively functioning communities of practice. As Wenger (1998) notes, communities of practice do not necessarily need facilitation but rather, they need energy and guidance. This research project will investigate types of strategies which constitute 'energy' and 'guidance' along with a range of issues which act to influence the forming and sustaining of situated learning conditions and communities of practice.

2.3.3 Challenges for manager facilitation of situated worker learning

The contemporary working environment is presenting a number of challenges for managers in how they facilitate informal on-the-job learning for workers. One of the key challenges facing managers and worker learners in contemporary organisations is how the organisation as a whole acknowledges and supports the facilitation of informal learning. One of the consequences of the general current economic downturn is that organisations are implementing strategies to reduce operational costs and to rationalise the use of resources. Organisations are establishing new ways of working and often this includes increasing use of new technologies to provide customer access to services and developing, in-house, methods for developing staff capabilities so that they can work in more cost efficient ways. One of the ways to work and learn more efficiently is to foster the formation of collaborative learning strategies such as learning with and from co-workers.

In recent years, however, strategies to reduce costs in public organisations have included reductions in the recruitment of permanent staff and a general increase in the employment of casual and contract staff. Such changes in the makeup of teams poses a challenge for organisations in implementing collegiate learning strategies. Casual staff are usually hired for their already well developed experience and skills. Similarly, casual staff tend not be remunerated

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to participate in on-the-job capability development programs nor to direct energy into developing learning related working relationships with others such as forming communities of practice (Hodkinson & Hodkinson 2004; Roberts 2006).

Another tension for managers is that, in some contexts, the employment relationship between workers and the organisation is contradictory. There is often an assumption in organisations that social groupings of workers will generate effective sharing of information and learning between workers. This concept is prevalent in much of the organisational learning literature which projects the sense that learning will unproblematically result from positive social relationships at work. However, the sharing of information and knowledge between social groups at work may not necessarily flow freely if, for example, job security is dependent upon the safeguarding of product or market intelligence (Contu & Willmott 2003, p. 294). Rather, information sharing has been found to be conditional upon a sense of trust in the other about how the information will be used. Also, short term employment contracts may not allow sufficient time nor motivation for casual workers to effectively enter into or contribute to a community of practice at work. There may be few incentives for casual workers to share information or their knowledge with others, nor engage in organisational problem solving.

In a similar vein, another difficulty for learning in communities of practice, relates to the way in which communities of practice operate. Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledge that equitable distribution of learning opportunities is sometimes placed in jeopardy when participation, and progression, in communities of practice is strongly influenced by the subjectivities of influential members. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation is, itself, based on relations of power and influence. On the one hand, progression of learners from novice through gradually increasing levels of participation, is, in essence, an empowering process for both novices and for guides. On the other hand, individual members can also act to hinder access to learning opportunities and

thereby adversely affect further participation and progression in learning. The operation of a community of practice can be distinctly disempowering for some (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 36). The influence of members of practice communities has potential to both steer the thinking, actions and outcomes of not only individuals, but the community of practice as a whole. Relations of power in communities of practice, particularly with respect to the way in which learning opportunities are made available, needs to be taken into consideration by managers and by organisational decision makers who plan to utilise a community of practice as a supportive informal learning construct.

The usefulness of a situated learning framework such as a community of practice, which sees learning as a process and product aligned closely with the physical, cultural and social context, has also been challenged. Some have argued that a situated learning model may restrict rather than extend opportunities for expanding knowledge in workplaces. Rather than fostering objectivity and innovative ideas, a socially situated learning model is sometimes viewed as geared to perpetuate narrow, inward looking views of work (Solomon 1999). This, of course, is only a problem if workplaces seek to broaden and expand worker views. In some circumstances, Solomon suggests that a community of practice could be viewed as restricting membership, by encouraging only those with common understandings and shared perspectives. Participants with views which challenge those of others within a community of practice may be actively discouraged or ignored. Therefore, communities of practice might not necessarily engender the type of expansive views and attitudes which most competitive organisations seek.

Other authors have also challenged some of the foundations of communities of practice. Some suggest that communities of practice set up an environment where workers entering the community are all assumed to be novices, and that these new entrants will automatically learn from experts already established within the community group. The intention of the function of a community of

practice is for novice learners to progress through stages of participation, in a more or less linear 'one way' process. There is little or no suggestion that novices could bring their own expertise to the community, or that experts, could or should encourage novices to do this. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004, p. 3) note that in Lave and Wenger's (1991) and in Wenger's (1998) later arguments, worker learners are often young people who lack prior work experience, and are assumed to accept, with little question, the learning they acquire from expert guides from within the community.

Additionally, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) question the exclusive focus on the linear transition of new entrant novices aspiring to become expert workers. They point out that new entrants to a community of practice may already be experienced or older workers, and may not necessarily seek the guidance of others to achieve a status of 'expert' within a community. In a similar vein, Hara (2009, p. 12), also notes that the 'novice/expert' transition is not the best way to look at the operation of communities of practice. Instead, it is better to view the community construct as an opportunity for fostering reciprocal knowledge sharing between all members, and focus on activities of the workplace, rather than on transitions in learning. This observation lays a solid foundation for the findings reported in this research project. It is not so much the way in which learners transition within communities. But, rather, the concept of practice communities in workplaces provides a useful structure within which skills, knowledge, expertise, co-worker collaboration and guided learning strategies can be shared in a range of ways (Hara 2009; Lave & Wenger 1991). For this reason, this research project proposes a community of practice is a concept, which managers could draw on to foster and support ongoing learning at work. It will be important for managers, who foster communities of practice and other collaborative learning strategies, to be aware of different perspectives and drawbacks in how collaborative learning strategies might operate in workplaces.

However, it was Lave and Wenger's original intention that communities of practice provide a mechanism not only for ongoing apprenticeship model participation and learning, but also for verification of activity and reassurance among participant learners. They see situated activity as a practice in which learning is viewed as an aspect of all activity. Wenger's further development of communities of practice sees learning for individuals as an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities. For organisations, it is an issue of refining their practices and ensuring new generations of members (Wenger 1998, p. 7). Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002) go further to suggest that, to understand informal learning and how it takes place, it is necessary to also understand the interrelationships between the intention and context of learning. Practices which support collaborative problem solving, ways to cross workplace boundaries, and the development of a deeper consideration for how learning takes place, are clearly required to foster and assist effective informal work related learning.

The way in which collaborative social relationships between co-workers are fostered will be critical to maintaining ongoing, work related learning in the current context of change in workplaces. Effective collaboration will be particularly important if organisations continue to divest roles and responsibilities for worker learning to line managers. The need for managers to have confidence in the skills of workers, and to be assured that knowledge is appropriately and equitably shared, will be critical to their own future viability as managers. Despite the inadequacies, a community of practice provides a framework which has potential to foster valuable connections between workers, and thus provide an avenue for workers to share their skills and knowledge.

Other challenges for managers in facilitating informal on-the-job worker learning include for example, keeping abreast of rapid changes in work, increases in workloads and the sometimes negative way in which the importance of learning is conveyed within an organisation. A lack of interest and focus on work related

learning by senior managers is also noted as an inhibitor for line managers in effectively facilitating worker learning (Ellinger & Cseh 2007, p. 447). Important to this research project are the ways in which managers create the types of conditions which invite workers to learn. Ellinger and Cseh (2007) in particular, point out that work related learning can be enhanced if managers intentionally model learning and development and encourage, support and reinforce the importance of developing others. Earlier Ellinger, Watkins and Bostrom (1999, p. 115) put forward a wide range of behaviours which they anticipated would support managers to guide the learning of others. These included strategies to empower and facilitate learning by, for example, broadening employee perspectives, engaging others to assist with learning processes and giving and receiving feedback from, and to, workers. However, as Vera and Crossan (cited in Ellinger & Cseh 2007, p. 449) note, managers often lack guidance on how their actions affect learning at work. Their lack of skills can impede worker learning by simply not recognising opportunities, or worse, withholding access and meaningful participation.

Growing responsibilities and new public management objectives to maintain continuous services, diversity products and increase sales revenue, will increasingly test managers. Consequently, the ways in which managers foster useful and collaborative relationships among their teams requires careful consideration of issues concerning communication, negotiation and modelling. But, as mentioned elsewhere, managers rarely receive any guidance on how to continuously support worker learning (Bierema & Eraut 2004; Ellinger, Watkins & Bostrom 1999; Macneil 2001).

2.4. Theme 4: Contributions from the organisational learning literature

To better understand the motivations and practices of managers to build worker capabilities, it is necessary to briefly review the concept of organisational learning. As pointed out in the *Introduction* to this research project, TAFE NSW as an organisation has developed specific goals to build capabilities among workers to ensure future business relevance and sustainability. One way this can be achieved, is through manager facilitation of on-the-job worker learning.

In the mid 1990's, Argyris and Schön (1996) put forward ideas about how the learning of individuals, groups and work units could be aggregated to contribute to the learning of a whole organisation. For learning to occur, they suggested that there needs to be three key elements; a learning product, a learning process and a learner to whom the product can be attributed. Some form of action, inquiry and knowledge transfer also needs to have taken place. Argyris and Schön (1996) further advocated that organisational learning takes place when the outcome of action, and inquiry, changes the way individuals think and act and, importantly, interact with higher level entities in an organisation, such as departments, groups or managers. The process of planning learning, and of how outcomes from learning activities are aggregated from individuals and groups into meaningful organisational learning, are further explored in the following sections.

2.4.1 How managers contribute to embedding learning in organisations

Schein, Senge and others (cited in Argyris & Schon 1996) suggest there are a number of ideal conditions which need to be in place to enable organisations to learn. These conditions include for example,

- flat decentralized organisational staffing structures which encourage team work

- collective problem solving and some decision making

- efficient information systems

- encouragement of experimental inquiry and critique

- incentives for worker learning

- an organisational ideology for learning

- appropriate quality controls

- performance development

- a level of openness in management and leadership

- an environment which fosters continuous staff learning.

These conditions represent broad requirements from both individuals and organisational decision makers. There is a need for extensive underpinning support from organisational policies, processes and work philosophies. But as Schein (cited in Argyris & Schon 1996) suggests a good starting point is for leaders and managers, who wish to make learning processes part of the workplace culture, begin by developing a 'learn how to learn' environment. For Schein, a successful formula would include the minimisation of fear of failure, and maximisation of trust and support for learners. Further, a willingness to act as a learning partner to workers is a critical skill in leading and developing learning organisations (Henson 2006, p. 37). Henson suggests, however, that careful communication, and continuous focus of attention on developmental needs for workers is hard work, and this requires managers to 'look after themselves'. By this Henson (2006, p. 42) is suggesting that managers need to not only support others, but that they also need to nurture their own learning and development.

Similarly, Hamel (cited in Bratton et al. 2004, p. 32) suggests that some of the core competencies of a successful organisation are its ability to foster collective learning among workers, to coordinate people and their production skills, and be able to effectively use multiple streams of technology. Teare and Rayner (2002) and later Armson and Whitely (2010) note that one of the key

characteristics of a learning organisation is its ability to learn, and to effectively place high value on workplace interactions between people. Coaching, guiding and the setting up of relevant and effective challenges are all considered to have significant merit as learning opportunities. However, they also note that some organisational structures and insufficient resources, manager's time and inadequate communication to workers about the 'big picture', can all contribute to worker and manager concerns about learning informally at work (Armson & Whiteley 2010, p. 417).

Of particular relevance to the current study, is the new public management environment of continual change and multiple business imperatives. In this environment, the key to sustainability of many public organisations will be their ability to recognise and manage iterative learning events with multiple stakeholders (Head 2010, p. 581). The learning orientation of public agencies, and their capacity to support various forms of ongoing worker and manager learning, is now considered a critical core component of public management policy and practice (Head 2010). So this raises the question of how public organisations support ongoing worker learning and capability development.

Differences in perspective about who benefits from organisational learning strategies have led to many debates and questions as to whether or not an organisation can learn. And, further, how do organisations subsequently embrace lessons learned in their documents and procedures? Is organisational learning merely an aggregation of the learning of individuals within an organisation? It is important to point out that the aggregation of worker learning into 'organisational learning' is critically subject to not only learner capacity, engagement and retention but also to line manager willingness to support worker learning. Essential also, is the need for managers to apply useful and appropriate skills in fostering the type of worker learning which will effectively contribute to strengthening an organisation's overall capability.

There are many positive outcomes from organisational learning strategies and for these reasons learning tends to be viewed as largely unproblematic and generally beneficial for all. But there are alternative views which see generic organisational forms of learning as less than ideal. Parding and Abrahamsson (2010) and Fenwick (2006b) and others for example, note a hidden curriculum in generic forms of learning which act to shape, adapt and even manipulate worker attitudes and practices. They raise concerns that workplace learning strategies can act to influence workplace culture to the extent that workers may accept subordination, become passive and helpless. Similarly, groups harbouring different values such as those which apply to specific professions may challenge those which are more aligned to administrative and organisational management values. Conflicts may arise in, and between, groups within organisations about what is most appropriate in terms of professional learning. Parding and Abrahamsson's (2010) study of teacher engagement with professional learning programs in the new public management governance environment, highlighted that teachers with specific professional learning requirements found that they need to find their own ways to fill knowledge gaps. Teachers indicated that the generic programs that were offered to them were largely unsatisfactory.

2.4.2 Developing work related knowledges to build organisational capability

This present study argues that managers play important dual roles in facilitating and endorsing on-the-job worker learning. It also argues that learning that is well supported by managers and executives, is more likely to contribute to organisational capability development than learning that is not overtly endorsed or supported by organisational executives. Managers are often tasked with responsibilities to create a culture of ongoing informal learning and this involves the setting up of conditions which foster social connections between workers. Managers anticipate that the transferring of local cultural knowledges will take place as a result of such connections. It is these informal cultural knowledges which enable workers to work effectively in everyday work situations.

The deployment of learning strategies to develop worker's information literacies and local context-based knowledges are vital in developing both worker capabilities and organisational 'know how'. An understanding of an organisation's 'ways of working', helps workers to respond and operate in organisationally acceptable ways. But acknowledged in literature, also, is that the ways in which skills and knowledges, acquired informally through day-to-day participation in social participation, are not well developed concepts of practices and are, moreover, largely 'taken for granted' by learners, managers and organisations (Eraut 2007, p. 405).

While context based knowledge is valuable to both individuals and organisations, Lloyd and Somerville (2006) point out, it also needs to be sanctioned as appropriate by others within the workplace. Using the example of novice firefighters entering fire stations for the first time, Lloyd and Somerville (2006) suggest new firefighters often go through a transitional phase in moving from institutional training and understanding into active participation in the work of fire stations. They observe that new firefighters take on a range of social and situated practices of the fire station as they move through different stages of learning. The fire station itself becomes the site of embodied practices and 'real learning' for workers (Lloyd & Somerville 2006, p. 191). Importantly, Lloyd and Somerville (2006) also note that senior firefighters play key roles in fostering the type of learning required by novice firefighters and that senior firefighters act as sources of practice based information and local knowledges. Significant responsibility is vested by fire station management in senior firefighters to model appropriate practices and impart their knowledge in ways which are accessible to novices. In this example, it is the senior firefighters, as line managers, who create and maintain a culture of mutual support and learning and to share the role of facilitating worker learning with other appropriately experienced co-workers (Eraut 2007, p. 420). Fire station management effectively sanction and endorse the guidance and transfer of local cultural knowledges provided by senior workers to novice workers. However, the

decisions made by managers, and the ways in which knowledges are made available and accessible for other workers, raise questions about whether or not managers are adequately equipped to deliver on such roles and organisational expectations. An important role for managers, for example, is to ensure that workers are assigned tasks that are appropriate for their competencies. But at the same time managers also need to continuously assess competence and capability development among workers so as to expand capabilities but not over challenge or exploit worker competencies or their capabilities.

2.4.3 Challenges for managers in building organisational capability

Work related learning is not a process or practice which engages every worker, nor, as pointed out previously, every manager. Adult learning related literature is one literature genre which recognises that some workers, particularly older workers, and of course, some younger workers, may not necessarily be interested or motivated, to extend or expand their skills, knowledge or experiences on-the-job. Learning on-the-job, and in the company of colleagues and supervisors, can be challenging and concerning for some workers. Being asked to participate in unfamiliar processes, and being expected to learn at the same rate as others in a group, can seriously disrupt some workers, and cause various levels of anxiety for others. This is particularly so, for workers who do not wish to be identified as learners at work, and for workers who do not wish to be assessed, judged or observed by managers, supervisors or co-workers. As Boud and Solomon (2003) note that being labeled as a learner at work can project a message that a worker is not adequately equipped for the job he or she is expected to perform. Similarly, being assessed by line managers at work can also cause significant anxiety for workers. Negative experiences of learning at work can place at risk the positive aspects of a worker's day-to-day working identity (Boud & Solomon 2003, p. 330). Therefore, understanding the way in which workers perceive their participation in work related learning activities and creating positive learning experiences is an important skill for managers who seek to develop and implement strategies to facilitate worker learning.

But Fenwick (2001), for example, challenges the idea that workplaces are really capable of equitably communicating, collaborating and sharing knowledges to assist workers to learn. Fenwick suggests that, in reality, the 'rosy democratic' outlook of human resource and management literatures often conceals significant divisions of labour within workplaces. Power based relationships have been known to inhibit worker trust, and undermine worker interest in on-the-job learning. To add to this, Fenwick also argues, work related learning is often legitimised as helping workers to improve their health and well being, their personal development and productivity. Garrick (1998, p. 8) too suggests that on-the-job learning and working, particularly where there are flexible working arrangements, often just means workers need to work harder with few rewards. These perspectives raise questions about where, in actuality, do organisational interests really lie when they promote and implement strategies to support on-the-job worker learning.

Another question raised by Argyris and Schön (1996, pp.193) is 'who benefits from structures and conditions put in place to support organisational learning and associated activities?' They argue that high performing organisations who claim to have learned, may not necessarily operate under what would normally be considered a right, or moral, code of conduct. Organisational learning, they say, is subject the values and ideals of decision makers about what is good and right, and who should benefit from organisational learning strategies. Similarly, Contu, Grey and Ortenblad (2003, p. 936) suggests that organisational learning primarily advocates learning which is directed to particular outcomes for the benefit of the organisation. This is certainly an acceptable position for organisations as a whole, given that their objectives are usually to manage and develop productive practices. But, it is not sufficient to assume that organisationally oriented learning will be suitable or effective for all workers. It is also not sufficient to assume that worker's experiences of on-the-job learning will all be positive, contextually useful, and contribute effectively to return on the organisation's investment. In relation to the concerns and differing perspectives on informal worker learning, Garrick (1998), and others, suggest that more

needs to be known about how incidental and informal learning is understood, recognised, structured and remunerated.

In an attempt to separate different types of learning in organisations, Argyris and Schön (1996) describe structured forms of learning with predictable outcomes as 'single loop' learning in organisations. While some workers will find this type of learning difficult, the prescriptive nature of the learning process will suit some other workers well. On the other hand, they suggest some learners will benefit from strategies which support learning by participating in new, more challenging experiences, reflecting and changing their behaviour as a result of this deeper form of learning. They refer to this type of learning as 'double loop ' learning. However, some workers in contemporary organisations have limited interest in, or motivation to gain, new experiences from participating in challenging activities. Others are unlikely to be in a position to substantially change their behaviours or work strategies as a result of reflection on their actions. Nevertheless, from an organisational perspective, the creating of opportunities for workers to reflect on their work, both during and after their engagement with activities, is viewed as useful in enabling workers to expand and extend their creativity and knowledge development (Boud & Walker 1991; Ellstrom 2006, p. 50).

Contu, Grey and Ortenblad (2003, p. 936) however, question the values of 'double loop' forms of learning. They suggest this form of learning is open to organisational controls which focus learners on an organisation's goals and objectives, and this acts to narrow, rather than broaden, the scope of what workers can learn. From an educational perspective, this is a valid point. However, in a business environment a scope of learning which may appear narrow, but optimises return on investment, is a desirable strategy. A challenge for line managers is to strike a balance between facilitating appropriate and useful forms of worker learning to meet both individual and organisational

needs. Another challenge for managers is to then develop strategies which build lessons learned into organisational memory and practice.

Despite differing perspectives and challenges, the concept of organisational learning does provide a useful background framework on which managers can organise the way they facilitate learning for workers. It highlights the need for clear links to be made between organisational objectives, the actions of managers and the learning of workers. It also brings forward the need to understand functional interactions between workers and managers within the structure of the organisation to optimise the creating of opportunities for, and the ongoing engagement of workers in, learning for the benefit of both individuals and the organisation. The need for a more substantial interest in how organisational learning can be achieved, and how managers contribute to worker and organisational capability development is the prime concern for this study.

2.5 Theme 5: Preparing managers to meet future worker learning needs

In considering what is already known about facilitating worker learning, a number of issues arise which suggest the process of facilitating worker learning may not be a straight forward process. Bierema and Eraut (2004, p. 58) note a number of difficulties for managers in contemporary workplaces with interests in developing staff capabilities. They suggest that one of the outcomes of the new interest in learning organisations has been that, while there is an increasing expectation for managers to facilitate on-the-job learning for others, managers are often assumed to be adequately equipped to carry out this role. Sometimes managers are not adequately prepared or skilled, appropriately motivated or sufficiently supported to effectively facilitate the development of worker capabilities. Eraut (2004) also notes that the informal learning role and

manager's personality, interpersonal skills and orientation to learning can greatly influence the ways in which workers learn.

Further, management development often emphasises motivation, productivity and appraisal processes, but comparatively little attention is given to how managers can better support the learning of workers, or how to appropriately allocate work and create an environment which promotes informal learning. Some of these deficiencies may be attributed to a lack of appreciation for how, and how much, informal learning takes place in workplaces (Eraut 2004, p. 271). However, there are still broad concerns about the appropriateness of managers' skills in facilitating worker learning and for understanding what support they need from within organisations. In most organisations, the practical implications for strengthening informal learning for developing individual and collective capability of employees are, similarly, not well understood. As Eraut (2004) suggests, development of managers for this role would be a highly significant move.

2.5.1 The need for better organisational support for managers to facilitate worker learning

The need for a more substantial level of interest in how worker capabilities are developed in organisations is discussed in a range of work related learning and human resource management literature (Bierema & Eraut 2004; Eraut 2007; Macneil 2003). The role of managers in facilitating not only individual workers to learn on-the-job but how they manage the physical and social conditions within the workplace, and how they create knowledge sharing environments, is being highlighted as an important component of a productive learning organisation (Fuller et al. 2007, p. 756)

Fuller and Unwin's (cited in Fuller et al. 2007, p. 744) research in the steel and metals sector in the UK noted that organisations differ in the way they create and manage themselves as learning organisations. From this they developed a conceptual framework which identified a range of organisational and pedagogical factors which influenced the ways in which workers learn. They note that work related learning can be located at different points on what they termed as an 'expansive-restrictive continuum' of workforce development. They found that it is expansive rather than restrictive environments which are more likely to foster learning at work and the integration of personal and organisational development through work related activities.

Fuller and Unwin's (Fuller et al. 2007, p. 745) 'expansive-restrictive continuum' suggests that expansive learning environments are environments which allow participation in multiple communities of practice, create opportunities for progression, extend worker identity and align individual goals with organisational capability strategies. In an expansive environment, managers facilitate and foster individual learning and the development of the workforce as a whole. In an expansive learning environment, learning is recognised and supported by those involved and by the wider organisation. In contrast, restrictive environments are those which restrict participation in multiple communities of practice, offer narrow opportunities for learning and lack organisational recognition of, and support for learning. Managers tend to control the work environment rather than foster the development of staff (Fuller et al. 2007, p. 745). Fuller and Unwin also recognise that organisations can apply deliberate strategies to constrain worker learning so as to support particular models of work organisation.

In addition, Fuller and Unwin (2004 cited in Fuller et al. 2007) point out that worker responses to opportunities can be shaped by worker's personal backgrounds, prior educational experiences and aspirations. They name this the learner's 'learning territory'. Importantly, Fuller and Unwin and colleagues

(2007, p. 744) draw attention to the need for sharp focus on the dynamic context in which learning takes place. This includes the wider regulatory, sectorial and organisational characteristics of organisations which not only influence the type of learning and knowledge acquired, but also the extent to, and manner in which, worker learning is recognised. The concept of 'expansive and restrictive learning environments' presents a useful lens through which to view the types of workplace conditions which support and constrain managers in facilitating on-the-job worker learning. The characteristics of expansive and restrictive learning environments further highlight the need for whole of organisation recognition and understanding of the types of conditions which support and constrain worker learning and, further, organisational capability development.

Similarly, the linking of day-to-day work and learning with organisational goals and the trend for managers to be held more accountable for worker learning and productivity is adding to this new interest (Ellstrom 1997; Fenwick 2007; Macneil 2001; Smith 2006). These new expectations suggest a need for organisations to improve the level of recognition of manager roles in facilitating informal worker learning and to better support managers in these roles.

Potential risks may become evident for organisations if managers are insufficiently equipped to facilitate on-the-job learning (Macneil 2001, 2003). Difficulties may arise if workplaces are not adequately set up to foster the types of productive learning conditions, policies, innovation or creativity required for supporting worker learning (Poell & Van Woerkom 2011). There are also difficulties for managers if they have insufficient facilitation skills or are reluctant to carry out this role. Reluctance is exacerbated when managers perceive that a change from their role as manager to that of a facilitator might undermine their positions within the organisation (Macneil 2001, p. 251). However, Macneil (2001, 2003) also recognises that in the current context of continual change, such a concern may become less critical to managers. The sharing of

knowledge and expertise to respond to changing work situations is likely to become far more important to both workers and managers.

While managers may start out with a well intentioned worker developmental program, their efforts can also be adversely influenced by a lack of confidence and a lack of support from the organisation for what they are trying to achieve. Watson and Maxwell (2007) in their study of line manager involvement in human resource development in Hilton Hotels in the UK, find that managers are generally committed to their roles in developing staff but they often experience difficulties managing their day-to-day work loads. As a consequence, they are not able to allocate sufficient time to developing staff. Hotel managers also note their own lack of skills in supporting on-the-job learning for workers and this created tensions in their everyday work. Burns (2002, p. 316) too found, in a survey of various organisations, that many managers who have roles as trainers want to be able to develop worker capabilities through on-the-job training and learning, but few had gained any formal qualifications in training, and few were able to demonstrate competence in giving and receiving feedback or in guiding workers to self-direct their own learning. Managers had few suggestions for guiding or encouraging workers to learn through work and many found they had insufficient skills to adequately provide feedback to workers.

From a number of studies focusing on workplace learning among professionals, technicians and managers, Eraut (2004, p. 271) concludes that part of the problem in both public and private organisations is that there is often a level of ignorance about how much learning on-the-job takes place and the quality of this type of learning. Further, policy discourse often treats problems as easily defined, and easily solvable. This leads to a proliferation of standardised training which discounts the complexities and uncertainties of contemporary workplaces. In addition, participants in Eraut's studies had difficulty in describing the more complex aspects of their work and the nature of their expertise. This he attributes to the dominant discourses in organisations which privilege

codified, propositional forms of knowledge. Informal learning was found to be largely tacit, unrecognised and largely invisible and for these reasons, participants were unaware of their own learning (Eraut 2004, p. 249). On the other hand, in a recent study of worker learners undertaking a transformational work based learning program in an Australian organisation, the learning of workers was found to be well supported, acknowledged and valued by the organisation's network of stakeholders. The learning of workers was viewed by senior managers and others as contributing to organisational capability (Choy 2009, p. 80). Clearly there are differing perspectives on the ways in which informal learning is recognised in organisations. But there is a growing need to further develop strategies which strengthen informal learning strategies and to extend worker capabilities. This need extends to enabling managers to balance and navigate multiple demands and dual responsibilities in maintaining productive practices and developing capable workers.

These examples illustrate that, though managers may be competent in providing management services and technical training, they can also lack confidence and the required skills to effectively or appropriately facilitate ongoing informal learning for others through day-to-day work.

2.5.2 Preparing for the new business environment

With increasing interest in improving return on investment, organisations in the UK have commenced taking steps to more closely align worker training with business strategies (Smith 2006). At the outset, this seems to be an obvious strategy, but the fact that such linkages are absent suggests, perhaps, that organisational training is being provided to meet short term needs rather than to address longer term strategic goals. Holland and De Cieri (2006) have noted this is also the case in a range of Australian organisations. This short term focus on learning suggests that work related learning and training is viewed as a skills gap filling process, rather than a longer term developmental strategy. Moreover,

the deficiencies in skills suggest a lack of focus on supporting learning strategies which will prepare workers to work with inevitable and ongoing longer term change. If organisations lack clear links to business objectives, then for what purpose is work related learning and training provided? It seems that staff training and development related departments in Australian organisations may be yet to realise potential benefits in making the type of training and learning available to workers which contributes to ongoing capability development and which maintains relevance to strategic business goals. As noted earlier, the roles managers play in developing ongoing learning strategies and affording appropriate opportunities to make this effective, are critical to organisational capability development in the contemporary work environment.

A recent trend to strengthen the inclusion of training and development in managers' performance targets (Smith 2006), shows an increasing level of awareness of, not only the value of investment in worker training, but also the importance of closer manager involvement in ongoing worker development. Cooney and Bhartia (cited in Holland & De Cieri 2006) go further, suggesting that line managers are better placed to address and support experiential, informal learning to facilitate knowledge sharing, than are organisational training and development units, which tend to focus on existing knowledge and skills gaps. Managers are also well placed to identify, and point out to others, the links between organisational objectives and on-the-job learning. They know how, and why, particular strategies are critical to organisational viability (Argote 2005, p. 88).

Webster-Wright (2009, p. 727), like many others, suggests there is a growing need to support continuing professional learning in organisations. But there is still a concerning trend for professional and informal learning to be reduced to episodic updates of information and delivery of programs in ways which are didactic and separated from authentic work contexts (Gravani 2007; Hawley & Valli,1999; and Murrell 2001 cited in Webster-Wright 2009). The way in which

organisations demonstrate their support for managers to become involved in identifying and enacting facilitative practices for ongoing everyday work related learning is, however, difficult to identify and define. Instead of counting and evaluating informal learning, a more effective way forward would be to find ways to develop a deeper understanding of how worker learning actually takes place. One of the ways to do this could be to inquire into informal professional learning in a more holistic way, and to take into account more about the context of where and how learning takes place.

However, Svensson, Ellstrom & Aberg (2004, p. 479) contest that informal forms of learning are sufficient for acquiring knowledge. They argue that informal learning needs to be complemented by formal learning and training programs. They suggest that formal learning programs not only develop learners' skills in identifying and solving problems in the contemporary work environment. But, importantly, these programs also assist learners to discover and make connections between work processes and practices. Informal learning, alone, cannot achieve this level of understanding. However, Webster-Wright (2009) points out that while informal leaning in organisations might be an important strategy for building context-based capability, and for connecting with formal learning strategies, it needs to be better understood and supported as a developmental process.

Emerging in work related learning literature, is a clear message that recognition for the facilitation of informal learning through ongoing work, and the creating of conditions for productive knowledge development, are urgent and important processes for contemporary businesses. As Bratton, Mills, Pyrch and Sawchuck (2004, p. 32) suggest, corporate executives, now, more than ever before, need to create work structures and workplace cultures which are conducive to continuous work-based learning if they are to achieve 'above average' economic performance. Billett (2003), Watson and Maxwell (2007), Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) and others have also recognised the growing

need for line managers to be involved in facilitating ongoing work related learning. Middle level managers are gradually being recognized for their potential to acquire and use valuable contextual and tacit knowledges to support informal worker learning (Hawke 2008). Importantly, there is some recognition that organisations need to more effectively support managers in these roles (Bierema & Eraut 2004, p.59; Eraut 2004, p.271; Macneil 2001, p.251; Macneil 2003, p. 301).

A myriad of issues can be seen, however, to influence the way opportunities for ongoing work related learning are made available to workers. Many work related learning models and lists of ideal practices have evolved to try to acknowledge and account for the multiplicities involved with informal learning. Most appear as lists for organisations to consider in implementing various forms of informal work related learning. Some are pitched at high level decision makers in organisations to consider in policies and procedures, and others are oriented to assist operational level implementation for supervisors and learners. Each provides some insight into different expectations for the ways in which informal learning operates and, further, could be supported in organisations. Many of the models and guides include elements which require some level of intervention or guidance from within the organisation to bring them into play.

In the next section the characteristics of several workplace learning models, strategies and conditions designed to build or scaffold learning opportunities for individuals, are briefly reviewed. The section concludes with some observations about the intent and emerging themes in these randomly selected 'models', and what might need to be considered in developing a future 'ideal' learning guide.

2.6 Frameworks, models, strategies, principles and imperatives for supporting work related learning practices

Numerous frameworks, models, strategies, principles and imperatives for guiding and achieving work related learning have been put forward in recent years. Some focus on strategies which will support individual learning and others set out more general conditions which are thought to support learning as an organisational aspiration. The reason for including a number of examples here is to show how others have conceptualised the types of conditions which they consider best support informal worker learning.

As noted previously in this review, Beckett (1999, p. 92) proposes ways in which managers can create and support organic (experiential) work related learning opportunities for workers in the context of everyday work. Beckett's ten strategies call for managers to:

- implement policies for corporate strategies to make work experience tangible, that is, through mentoring and coaching programs
- develop policies which acknowledge development of individual workers - their work appraisals and career plans
- restructure work to allow peer collaboration through natural groups and occupational teams
- provide amenable workplace conditions
- institute incentives to learn, which are tangible in nature, such as promotion into career advancing positions, offer of support to enter into further study including formal qualifications
- articulate the need for strategically significant workplace learning and use this to shape program design
- articulate clear expectations of legal and ethical accountability
- manage the work environment more collaboratively than consultatively - surfacing 'people' competencies
- collaboratively establish a workplace mission

- link mission statements to evidence of learning (papers, conferences, simulations, appraisals etc).

In Beckett's model, experiential learning is assumed to be supported by organisational policies and structures which create and sustain learning conducive conditions and acknowledge and support the role of managers in creating such conditions. The role of coordinating priorities would need to be accepted and taken on by people or groups, who have both the authority and skills to bring together relevant parties to manage the provision of learning conducive conditions. Beckett's model highlights that it is not enough to just develop organisational policies and to make decisions about how to strategically support work related learning. Rather, it brings forward the breadth and critical nature of the role that managers can play in supporting worker learning. Further, Beckett's model highlights the need to support managers to be able to put in place facilitative strategies, and to effectively apply these strategies in the context of everyday work tasks.

In 1993, Watkins and Marsick (p.11) put forward a number of guiding principles, or what they call 'action imperatives', for supporting learning at work through whole of organisation strategies. Their action imperatives include:

- the creation of continuous learning opportunities
- encouragement of collaboration and team learning
- empowerment for people
- a strong connection between the organisation and its environment.

Such conditions would, they suggest, support the type of ongoing worker learning that is required to contribute to whole of organisation learning. Their action imperatives build on the earlier principles set out by Watkins (1991, p. 30) for facilitators of workplace learning: for facilitators to acknowledge the workplace as a social context, be able to combine formal and informal strategies, to allow continuous learning, and to encourage critical reflection

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without controlling the process. As Watkins pointed out, the ability of a workplace facilitator to be aware and competent in fostering productive social relationships is critical to the successful facilitation of work related learning. The need for the deployment of these types of strategies, are again, evident in their later broader ranging action imperatives.

Livingston and Sawchuck (2004, p. 155) suggest that to maximize learning experiences for workers, several local educational practices need to be developed. They suggest five practices support in-the-job learning, as follows:

- ensuring that a practical and relevant curriculum with a variety of learning strategies and approaches is in place
- ensuring that the learning context is sensitive to the audience and that workers are engaged
- engaging instructors who have extensive knowledge, specific and broad skills, and knowledge of the workplace context
- creating conditions which foster positive social networking
- supporting 'self-directed' learning for both individual and collective learning purposes.

Livingstone and Sawchuck's practices are organized around delivery of structured learning in workplaces as evidenced by the use of curriculum and trainers. Nevertheless, the listed practices are clearly intended to create conditions which will support social networking and will ensure that workers are involved in collaborative and informative processes. In a similar way to Beckett's (1999) model, they also suggest a need for management involvement in the organisation and coordination of work and learning strategies, and in the management of conditions which support both guided and self-directed learning.

Similarly, Billett (1994) proposed a number of key components which could constitute an effective situated learning model for supporting, and furthering, worker learning in workplace contexts. Billett's model draws on an apprenticeship model of learning but can also applied to less structured, informal work related learning situations. Billett's workplace learning model includes:

- worker access to authentic activity
- provision of appropriate tasks and challenges for learners
- access to experts and peers
- support and scaffolding from a mentor, coach, model or guide
- sufficient time to engage meaningfully in learning related activities
- opportunities for learners to initiate their own learning rather than relying on directions from others

While, these components encapsulate broad concepts, they emphasise the potential positive and developmental influence on learning of guidance from others and a supportive workplace context. The apprenticeship model also assumes experts and guides will be adequately motivated and equipped to carry out the roles vested in them.

Later in 2002, Billett went on to propose a workplace pedagogy which extends the 1994 model, to focus on the need for planning and orchestrating conditions which have potential to support different types of learners to develop their interests and engagement. Key elements of this pedagogy include:

- intentional structuring of work and provision of guidance
- acknowledgement of different kinds of affordances of access to activities and how workers engage with these and the type of support they can secure,
- encouragement of full engagement in learning activities, to develop robust knowledge.

Similarly, Skule and Reichborn (2002) take a learner oriented view of work related learning, putting forward a set of seven conditions which they see as optimal for workers to learn on-the-job. These conditions are:

- exposing workers to workplace change
- exposure to work related demands
- management taking responsibility for learning
- contact with professionals external to the worker's own organisation or location of work
- providing workers with feedback on performance
- demonstrating support for learning from the organisation's management rewarding proficient work

Skule and Reichborn's model indicates a need for organisation of work and senior level decisions to enable such conditions to exist within the day-to-day workplace. Their model emphasises a need for managerial, or at least supervisory, input into providing suitable conditions. The model strongly indicates a role for line managers in creating these constructive and supportive learning conditions, and, further, to sustain appropriate learning environments.

Both organisationally and individually oriented practices and strategies present a number of implications for managers and supervisors. Underpinning these models, frameworks and other ideals are strategies and skills which managers need to be able to deploy and apply. In particular, managers need to be able to organise and coordinate day-to-day operations which enable workers to make connections with other workers and managers. There is however, an absence in these examples of strategies, imperatives and practices of explicit organisational support, and specific facilitative managerial capabilities to initiate and manage worker learning. Support from organisational executives and other senior decision makers is not overtly articulated as an important condition or practice to back up worker learning. The development of skills, for example, in broad communication and the ability to create effective learning networks and

share knowledges are not made apparent, or are only implied in most of the models. While the creation of appropriate conditions is replicated in lists of ideals, ways to sustain productive and relevant learning opportunities for workers are largely assumed. Finally, skills in effective communication, planning, organising and fostering, for example, communities of practice, as would be required to bring appropriate learning conditions together, and to effectively support ongoing learning, appear integral to the process. Yet, in each of the examples, acknowledgement that managers need particular skills and support to effectively facilitate worker learning are also under-emphasised as conditions for supporting ongoing worker learning.

2.7 Drawing conclusions from the diverse literature

This review of work related learning has highlighted a number of issues concerning the concept and practice of facilitating work related learning. These issues are relevant to the study for their value in bringing forward the issues driving the need for work related learning in organisations and the importance of understanding the influence of context, specifically social and organisational relations, on how learning opportunities are afforded to and facilitated for workers. The review of literature has helped narrow the scope of the research and to focus the study on relevant aspects of manager involvement in facilitation of work related learning. The review of contemporary work related learning literature has highlighted the value of nurturing productive social relationships in workplaces and the importance of learning conducive contexts in the way workers participate in developing their on-the-job knowledges and capabilities. The review of human resource development and organisational learning literature has also highlighted the potential contributions made by ongoing professional development of workers and to the ongoing capability development of organisations.

However, the review also made apparent a dearth of discussion about the actual role of managers in developing on-the-job capabilities among workers and how this role aligns or otherwise with wider organisational learning strategies. This gives an impression that little is known about how, in practice, managers become involved in or deploy strategies to facilitate worker learning. Work related organisational learning and human resource development literature present rich sources of discussion about worker learning, organisational learning ideals and human resource management and development ideals. But what is missing from the literature is evidence of, and commentary about, actual manager practices and the influences of context in how they facilitate worker learning. As a consequence, there is also little evidence in the literature about the ways in which organisations encourage and support managers who take on this important role nor how the strategies they deploy are recognised.

The review of work related, human resource and organisational learning literature reinforces the observation that more needs to be known about manager involvement in professional development of workers as a way to contribute to workplace productivity (Bierema & Eraut 2004; Evans et al. 2006; Webster-Wright 2009). These observations provided the theoretical framework for, and background to, the research design which seeks to inquire into and illuminate actual manager practices, the influence of context and how an organisation acknowledges the role and supports managers to facilitate ongoing on-the-job learning for workers.

The review of literature has also highlighted a growing expectation for managers to be more involved in worker learning. Examples of strategies and skills managers need to deploy to facilitate ongoing worker learning and how these strategies contribute to learning at an organisational level have also been discussed. A number of agreements and contentions are raised about the nature of informal learning and how learning at work can be guided and

facilitated by managers. The importance of managing the workplace context has also been raised.

The conceptual frameworks of human resource development, situated and other work related learning and organisational learning provide ideas on different aspects and issues impacting on how learning at work can takes place. Concepts of situated learning have guided the search for insights into how informal learning can be achieved and supported in workplaces. As the review of some recent human resource and work related learning literature makes clear, worker learning is increasingly being recognised as needing to be shifted from decontextualised training locations into context rich workplaces. This has created a need for managers to become more involved in assisting and facilitating on-the-job worker learning processes. The role of managers in facilitating worker learning is, however, a challenging one, as they juggle organisational expectations to meet service targets and, at the same time, nurture learning for workers with various skills and motivations to learn on-the-job. Further, manager skills and dispositions for providing equitable access to learning are largely assumed in literature and in organisations. A number of researchers have suggested that while managers can, and do, play important roles in facilitating worker learning, the support afforded by organisations to assist managers to develop appropriate strategies and skills to facilitate worker learning is, generally, limited. Organisations appear ill equipped to adequately understand, or acknowledge, the role or the ways in which managers facilitate informal worker learning. Further, literature provides few insights into the types of difficulties faced by managers, and organisations, in planning and deploying strategies to effectively facilitate ongoing informal work related learning for workers. Overall, there is little in literature, or in strategies developed by TAFE NSW, to guide a manager in what to do, or how to facilitate ongoing on-the-job worker learning.

A range of literature indicates ideas on how work related learning strategies can be deployed. Some of it has implied the types of skills managers could apply to assist workers to learn on-the-job. Situated learning literature, and much of the organisational learning literature reviewed, has emphasised the importance of positive social connections between workers as a way to support informal and ongoing worker learning. The concept of communities of practice underpins the research project and has been used as a lens to explore the way in which learning at work could be facilitated for individuals and for groups. Issues which could constrain managers in how they facilitate on-the-job worker learning have also been discussed.

Ideas about how managers might facilitate worker learning, and some of the challenges they face, have been brought forward in this review. Some of the issues hindering managers include a lack of time and resources to develop and implement learning strategies, a lack of confidence and competence to effectively facilitate informal worker learning for others, and fear, among some workers, to identify as learners at work. Several recent studies have discussed managers' actual experiences in facilitating on-the-job worker learning and these provide answers for some workplace contexts. However, how and in what ways managers facilitate worker learning in the context of a government organisation, such as TAFE NSW, are aspects of a manager's role which are not yet sufficiently identified and articulated in contemporary literature. Nevertheless, literature reviewed in the present research project provides sufficient insights to guide the development of answers to the primary research question which ask 'what role does a manager play in facilitating informal ongoing work related learning?' and the secondary question 'how does the organisation support managers in this role?'

The literature also provides a range of views and commentary about how and why learning environments are fostered to assist in answering the subsequent research questions 'what motivates, aids and constrains managers to facilitate

informal worker learning?' and 'what might need to continue or change for this role to more effectively contribute to both individual worker learning needs and an organisation's worker capability goals?' The sample work related learning models reviewed provide an overview of some of the key components for structuring and approaching work related learning in different contexts and for different purposes. The common theme in each is the need to build an effective work related learning environment and there is some emphasis on fostering social and collaborative connections between workers. These models provide background for the development of a framework for practical manager facilitation of informal worker learning. The framework, and an accompanying ideal model, are later presented in Chapter 5 as responses to answering the research questions and as outcomes of the research project.

In the next chapter the research methods used to collect evidence from four cases are discussed and used to illustrate manager roles in facilitating on-the-job worker learning. The methods and case methodology bring to light a wide range of manager practices, their successes, obligations and challenges. Analysis of cases is discussed in Chapter 4 and this enables a detailed consideration of the manager's actual strategies, their skills and local influences which shape their role in facilitating ongoing, on-the-job worker learning in a contemporary government organisation.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In this chapter the research strategy, design and methods are explained, as well as the reasons for choosing a case study strategy as the main preferred research method. Case study has been a common research strategy in broad fields of psychology, sociology, political science, social work, business, economics and community planning (Creswell 2007, p. 73; Merriam 1988; Yin 2003). Yin takes the position that the case study is a research 'strategy' which supports inquiry in a wide range of contexts and situations. It facilitates the gathering of information which can be used to develop knowledge of, for example, individuals, organisations and other complex social phenomena. The case study strategy allows the gathering of meaningful characteristics of real life events while simultaneously enabling a holistic view. Thus, case studies have been used successfully in inquiries into, for example, lifecycles, neighbourhood changes and managerial processes (Yin 2003).

The design of the present research project case study is based on a series of observations which indicate a number of gaps in everyday understanding of the role of a line manager in facilitating ongoing work related learning. The study seeks to clarify what it is that managers actually do to fulfill their obligations to develop worker capabilities in the context of a government workplace and in the context of everyday work related activities. As an outcome, the study aims to draw attention to the value of better supporting this role in organisations. The problem, nature and location of this social study indicate a case study approach is an effective mechanism through which to explore these observations and the research problem.

The case design, including the research questions, purpose statement, choice of participants, criteria for analysis and the way the data is used to link to the research arguments are set out to give context and structure to the analysis and

discussion which follows in Chapter 4. The case reporting format, data collection methods and ethical issues are outlined to show how evidence has been collected and carefully considered in relation to the research questions, analysis and case findings. The reasons for choosing a case study strategy to inquire into this problem are explained in more detail in the next section.

3.1 Methodological issues

3.1.1 The case study design

This case study is designed to answer the primary research question of '*what is* the role of an Operations Manager in facilitating informal, ongoing work related learning?' and the secondary question of '*how does* the organisation support this role?' The case study approach was also determined to be the most appropriate mechanism for gathering empirical data which could be used to answer the subsidiary questions '*What motivates, aids and constrains managers to facilitate informal work related learning?'* and '*What might need to continue or change for this role to more effectively contribute to both individual worker learning needs and an organisation's worker capability development goals?*'

Case study is a valuable and useful method for investigating issues and problems in highly context dependent settings (Yin 2003). The specific purpose of this inquiry is to inquire into, explore and uncover the experiences of managers in facilitating ongoing informal work related learning. Further, it is anticipated that the inquiry will enable key elements of manager's facilitative learning strategies to be identified and ultimately, more clearly defined and stated. The purpose of this inquiry is also to identify and bring to light the types of motivations, strategies and skills applied by managers which make up the actual practices of college Operations Managers in facilitating ongoing worker

learning. The diverse workplace context and roles of Operations teams is anticipated to have a significant bearing what strategies managers deploy, and on what skills managers apply to facilitate informal on-the-job worker learning. The case study strategy, therefore, provides an avenue for exploring the role of managers in some depth and breadth, and in allowing relevant day-to-day experiences and practices of college Operations Managers to be recorded, compared, analysed, illustrated and discussed. The inclusion of information gathered from Staff Development Managers enables some consideration of the perspective of the organisation in how it supports worker learning and in how it assists managers to develop their facilitative learning skills. The main interests of the case study lie in not only what managers do, but how, where and why they become involved in facilitation of on-the-job worker learning and how the organisation supports the role.

The case study approach was therefore chosen, over other methods such as surveys or experiments, for the way in which it allows its component methods to facilitate inquiry into particular issues and at the same time, allow generalizations to be developed from the analysis of experiences of others (Merriam 1988; Yin 2003). In order to look at the role of Operations Managers in some detail, the study views managers' practices not in isolation, but rather, within the context of the organisation and its business goals and objectives. The case study will allow these different but interrelated aspects of the role, and their relationship to the productivity of the organisation, to be studied in some depth.

Yin (2003, p. 6) cautions, however, that research questions which ask 'what', 'who' and 'where' are often better addressed by methods other than case studies. This is because these types of questions often aim to describe, or predict an incident or a phenomena. The present research project, however, aims to explore a largely unknown element of a manager's day-to-day responsibilities and there is an expectation that the study will lead to further

inquiry in the future. Thus the case study approach is considered appropriate and justifiable for this initial exploration. The case study was also chosen for its ability to explore and uncover aspects of manager's learning facilitation practices, possible problems and various organisational perspectives which may not necessarily have been anticipated in the research initial design stage (Merriam 1998, p. 13).

The present case study design takes the form of a holistic case study, characterised by a single unit of analysis, with evidence drawn from multiple cases (Yin 2003, p. 47). In this case study, there are four separate cases providing evidence from four college Operations Managers, four Institute Staff Development Managers and from documents associated with each college. The four case colleges are located in TAFE NSW Institutes. The single unit of analysis is 'the role of the College Operations Manager in facilitating informal, on-the-job work related learning'. The benefits of a holistic, multiple case design, are that while the case study focus is the role of the Operations Manager, data is drawn from multiple sites enabling the experiences of managers to be compared and contrasted between cases. The logic underlying the choice of multiple cases is one of literal replication, where similar results have been predicted, and of theoretical replication, where contrasting results are also predicted (Yin 2003, p. 47). As such, the case study predicts and anticipates that manager perspectives, practices and workplace conditions, in some cases will vary and in others, will be similar.

The case study is 'particularistic, inductive, and heuristic' (Merriam 1988, pp.7) in intent. This means the case study is designed to inquire into the particular issue of manager actions in facilitating ongoing informal learning for others and this concentrates attention on the way managers address the need to be involved in ongoing informal learning for others at work. Overall, the case study is designed to explore rich sources of information and provide an accurate, valid and reliable evidence from which answers to the research questions can be

drawn. Issues relating to each case are analysed and discussed for their relevance to the whole case (Yin 2003, p. 50). While the case study is located in a particular college based managerial setting the outcomes of the analysis are anticipated to be broadly generalisable to other contexts.

The case study therefore seeks a holistic view of the manager's role and how it links with the goals and the context of the organisation. For these reasons, the case study is considered the most appropriate for revealing typical manager practices and to compare these with evidence of the organisation's current documented expectations for manager involvement in building worker capabilities. The findings from the case are used to contribute to developing a better understanding of the role of managers as facilitators of work related learning. The case study design, including the components forming the theoretical framework, is elaborated next.

The case study design is underpinned by five key components. These include the research questions, purpose statement, unit of analysis, the logic connecting the data to the purpose of the research, and the criteria used to interpret the findings (Yin 2003, p. 29). Together with relevant insights from literature these elements form the theoretical framework for the study and guide the case data collection and analysis strategy.

It is intended that the two primary questions will generate data which will inform and enable an accurate illustration of the strategies Operations Managers deploy and the type of skills they use to facilitate informal learning at work. It is intended that the two subsidiary questions will generate data which will indicate what actually influences, drives, enhances or constrains managers to enact this role and what might need to continue or change for this role to effectively contribute to addressing worker and organisational capability needs and goals.

The rationale for this study is based on observations from literature and a range of government and non-government workplaces that the role of line managers in facilitating informal learning for workers is an activity of growing importance to organisations. As presented in Chapter 1 of the present research project, the skills and strategies of line managers, in assisting workers to develop on-the-job capabilities in environments of constant change, are becoming increasingly critical in the drive to maintain productivity and provision of student (customer) services. The need for workers to operate efficiently, while negotiating new systems, policies, procedures and rapidly changing equipment and technologies, is a key challenge for managers. Yet, this is a challenge which has not yet attracted much attention in work settings or in contemporary work related learning, management or human resource development literature. The facilitative learning role of line managers tends to be an assumed and implied role and has not, to date, been the subject of any extensive inquiry. By implication, the role appears to be not well acknowledged and, arguably, less well understood than some other elements of manager roles and responsibilities.

The study argues that ongoing, on-the-job facilitation of worker learning now, more than ever before, plays a key role in contributing to the way workers contribute to managing day-to-day products and services. Managers are not employed as trainers or teachers, but the study argues they play important roles in assisting workers to develop new work related knowledges in ways which are not achievable or practical through participation in formal training sessions alone. Observations in workplaces and work related learning literature suggest line managers play important roles in creating appropriate learning opportunities through everyday work to complement worker's existing capabilities and to build new capabilities. The focus on Operations Managers enables the case to look both broadly at manager practices which incorporate forms of informal learning, and at the same time narrow the study to the context of their everyday work within the complex organisation of a vocational education and training college.

3.1.2 The cases and how they were selected

The four cases that together comprise the holistic case were selected for their potential to generate useful information and to contribute to developing further knowledge in the field (Denzin & Lincoln 1998). In this research, an anticipated outcome is a better understanding of the role of an Operations Manager or manager with a similar brief, as a facilitator of work related learning in the context of a large government organisation.

The heuristic educative and inductive characteristics of the case study design, allow a range of elements of cases to be identified and discussed in some detail. The analysis and outcomes from the study present opportunity for both the researcher and the reader to extend existing understanding of the process and practice of facilitating work related learning.

In order to ensure sufficient data to develop a fair and accurate representation of the actual role, it is necessary to look at the roles as individual processes and practices carried out by different managers in different college contexts as they are located in different geographical areas of the State of NSW. Two cases are located in metropolitan areas of Sydney, and two are located in rural and regional areas. It was felt that data from different geographic locations may reveal some interesting and contrasting elements of the role and context which could add depth to the study. Each 'case' consists of data drawn from the college Operations Manager, an Institute Staff Development Manager and a range of documents which were considered relevant to the wider organisation's perspective on staff learning and development strategies at the case site. Five college Operations Managers were contacted firstly by telephone and by email to ascertain their interest and availability to participate. All responded that they were willing to participate. A copy of the *'Letter to Participants*' is included in Appendix 4 and a copy of the *'Letter requesting participant consent to participate in research'* is included in Appendix 5.

Cases selected were 'purposive' in that they met a selection of predetermined criteria (Goetz and LeCompte 1984 cited in Merriam 1988). Selection criteria included:

1. researcher's potential familiarity with the role of the Operations Manager and the context of College operations in vocational education and training colleges in NSW.

2. the number of staff supervised by the Operations Manager, which is indicative of the breadth and complexity of the operations of the college. The number of staff is also indicative of the number of students enrolled, the breadth of courses offered, the number of teaching sections, the nature of administration and technical support processes managed and the type of additional issues Operations Managers are likely to manage which may influence the manager's role in facilitating on-the-job learning of workers.

3. accessibility of colleges; that is, locations within a reasonable travel distance for the researcher.

Cases have been chosen for their potential to provide both similar and some contrasting data. There are similarities and differences in the sizes (numbers of students), geographical locations in NSW, the types of operational staff positions (technical and administration) and the grading (salaries) of Operations Managers. The ways in which staff development programs are provided for all college staff are, however, largely similar.

For data collection purposes, the first case site was treated as both a full case and also as a site for testing the suitability, and value of data collection methods. After the initial review and preliminary analysis of data, the initial design and preliminary data collection strategies were confirmed to be suitable and appropriate to address the research questions. After the completion of data collected from the first three cases, it was noted that while many of the themes appeared to replicate, some interesting variations also arose between the

cases. A fourth case located in a regional area of NSW, was added to the strategy to not only look for similarities and differences in a second regional location, but also to explore some manager facilitative strategies in more depth than had been possible for the interviews conducted at the first three case locations.

The holistic approach allows the four cases to be considered as separate entities but with each contributing to the development of broad generalizations as they apply to the whole case. The four cases are referred to hereafter as the fictitious names Blue Bay College, Timbers College, Oakman City College and Mid-State College. The relationship of these colleges to the case unit of analysis is outlined in Figure 2 following:
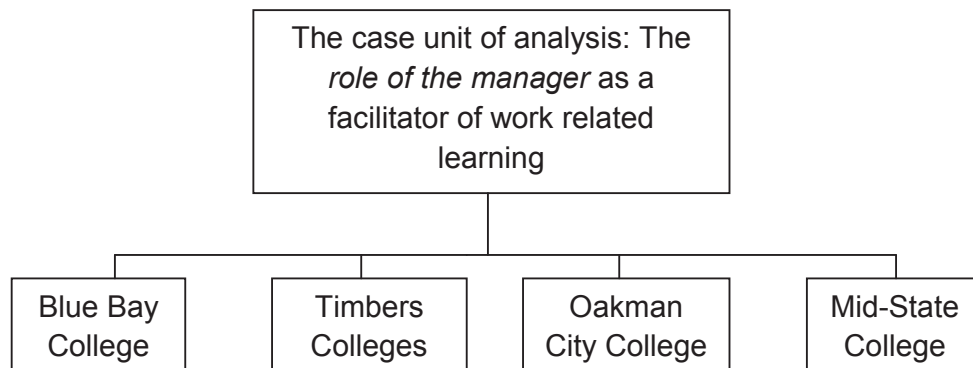
Figure 2: The holistic case design with a single unit of analysis informed by multiple cases.

3.2 Overview of the four cases, reliability of data, analysis strategy, reporting and ethical considerations

3.2.1 Case 1: Blue Bay College

Blue Bay College is a large college located in a regional area south of Sydney. The college enrols 4,000 students each year. Blue Bay College offers a wide range of vocational training courses in disciplines such as art, design, fashion, media, music, automotive transport, maritime studies, building and construction, business administration, mining, hair and beauty, hospitality, nursing, child studies and information technology. To support this range of vocational courses, the college employs 22 non-teaching technical support and administrative staff. The Operations Manager and her team are responsible for managing services such as course information and promotions, course applications and enrolments, exams, academic results, graduations, technical support services in laboratories, salons, tool stores, building yards, and other areas where staff are required to manage workshops, equipment and tools.

The Operations Manager is also responsible for managing administration services to teaching sections, college non-teaching budgets, building maintenance, and coordination services for college building and grounds developments, a children's centre and a range of student activities and other day-to-day services. The overall college budget is limited and this requires the Operations Manager to utilize staff and resources in economical ways, saving costs wherever possible. The Operations Manager is a member of a wider Institute group of twelve college Operations Managers who meet from time to time to discuss Institute strategies and to share day-to-day operational procedures and practices. Institute networking and committee structure requires the Operations Manager to travel long distance to attend meetings and developmental activities. The Operations Manager places a high level of importance on staff informal learning and is active in encouraging staff to learn on-the-job and from one another.

The Institute Staff Development Management unit is located in another regional city and is tasked with gathering information about staff learning needs and planning staff development activities. The Institute staff development planning process is strongly influenced by the amount of funding made available for staff learning and development and by pressing compliance related requirements such as teacher training and occupational health and safety and child protection requirements. The Institute's leadership development program has been extended to include non-teaching managers along with educational managers. The Staff Development unit offers training courses in how to use a range of new technologies and recently commenced training to assist non-teaching staff in how to implement a new performance development scheme. The funds available for other developmental activities for non-teaching staff are limited and self-directed learning strategies for non-teaching staff are widely encouraged by the Institute.

The Operations Manager at Blue Bay College is a middle level manager whose day-to-day responsibilities are focused on day-to-day administration, class support, finance management and staff related matters. The day-to-day work context of the Operations Manager is characterized and largely dominated by managing implementation and ongoing use of new systems, new policies and departmental initiatives, and changes to procedures and processes. Overlying all of this is a degree of uncertainty created by organisational level change and continuously diminishing resources.

3.2.2 Case 2: Timbers College

Timbers College is a large college located in metropolitan Sydney. The college enrols approximately 10,000 students each year and employs approximately 100 non teaching operational staff including both permanent, temporary and casual positions. The college offers a narrower range of courses compared to most other colleges, specializing in teaching in just five disciplines. A major

discipline is engineering. The large number of non teaching staff at this college is attributable to servicing the college's commercial business training facilities which operate over an extended six day training week. The Operations Manager shares similar roles compared to the Operations Manager at Blue Bay College with similar responsibilities focusing on staff recruitment and management, managing budgets and new systems and procedures and managing changes initiated by the organisation and the impacts on staff at the college level.

The Staff Development Management Unit is located some distance from the college and is responsible for planning and conducting staff development programs. The unit manages similar staff development budgets and offers similar compliance related training as the unit supporting colleges in the region in which Blue Bay College is located.

Similar to other colleges, the Staff Development Management Unit's strategies supporting Timbers College provide opportunities for a small number of non-teaching staff to participate in structured coaching and mentoring programs and staff are also are encouraged to participate in informal online learning programs. The overall staff development approach for non-teaching staff is supportive but, in a similar way to Blue Bay College is primarily focused on providing compliance training and leadership development. Self directed learning using online learning packages are also encouraged. The Staff Development unit also offers training courses in how to use new technologies and how to implement the new departmental performance development scheme.

3.2.3 Case 3: Oakman City College

Oakman City College is a large college located on the outer perimeter of metropolitan Sydney. The college enrols approximately 10,500 students each year in a wide range of courses including building and construction, plumbing trades, electrical trades, business management, human resource development, community services, welfare, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and environmental studies. There are 40 non-teaching staff positions including the Library and Counselling teams, administration, maintenance and technical class support staff reporting to the Operations Manager. The Operations Manager's role is similar to the roles of Operations Managers at Blue Bay and Timbers Colleges and is subject to similar funding restrictions, resources and organisational policies and initiatives.

A point of difference however, is that the Operations Manager at Oakman City College has taken on a more strategic and external business orientation to his role than the equivalent managers at Blue Bay and Timbers Colleges. This is because the Operations Manager at Oakman City College has implemented a new initiative to develop a closer working relationship with the local business community as a way to further develop opportunities for student work placements and as a way for local businesses to become more involved with vocational training at the college. This business focus is reflected in the manager's activities and interests in representing the college on the local community business council and in engaging local government and industry bodies in the 'business' of the college. The Operations Manager's perspective of his role is to 'take the college forward' and for the college to integrate more effectively within the local business and residential community. The Operations Manager also takes on a more strategic role in managing staff on-the-job learning than the manager at Blue Bay College and Timbers Colleges by implementing new strategies to encourage non-teaching staff to foster more effective socialised working relationships.

The range of responsibilities of the Operations Manager at Oakman City College incorporates a similar but somewhat wider range than those of the manager at Blue Bay College. The role is however, not unlike that of the role of the Operations Manager at Timbers College. The number of students, size of the operating budget, the condition of buildings and nature of projects is similar to those of Timbers College, yet the Operations Manager at Timbers College is not involved in community liaison and did not indicate any particular focus on being involved in building external business relationships with local industries or other government agencies. Similar to other colleges, the Staff Development Managers, responsible for providing staff learning and development for Oakman City College, focus their resources and effort to offer teacher and compliance related training and a range of self-directed e-learning activities which are available to Operations Managers and their teams. The Staff Development unit also recently commenced offering training in how to use a range of new technologies and how to implement the department's performance development scheme for non-teaching staff.

3.2.4 Case 4: Mid-State College

Mid-State College is located in a regional area of NSW where the local industries include small farm holdings, fruit and vegetable production, mining and light manufacturing industries. The college enrols over 15,000 students each year and offers a broad range of qualifications in apprenticeship training and vocational courses in, for example, engineering, child studies, hospitality, business, hairdressing, science, horticulture and community services. There are 158 non-teaching staff on the Operations team, with eight staff reporting directly to the Operations Manager. Compared to most other colleges in the State, Mid-State College is very large college and the Operations Manager holds a senior level position. College operations staff include clerical and administration workers, course and career information teams; admissions and student records teams; children's centre and child care workers; engineering and science technical support staff; workshop, tool store and laboratory class support teams;

Counsellors and library staff. While most positions support college teaching and learning, some positions are classified as 'Institute' positions which provide services and support to all of the colleges within the wider Institute cluster. The Operations Manager is responsible for managing a very large college and staffing budget, student administration, technical support staff teams, a children's centre and is vested with a wide range of college and Institute commitments. Similar to other colleges, the Operations Manager at Mid-State College is familiar with managing continuous change in systems and procedures and limitations on resources. The Operations Manager takes a similar strategic position to that of the Operations Manager at Oakman City College in the way he manages his Operations team. However, differing from the manager at the other three colleges, the manager at Mid-State College has put in place a staff learning and development plan for operations staff to assist their ongoing capability development.

The Staff Development Manager responsible for guiding staff learning at Mid-State College is also familiar with the new and growing requirement that all staff, particularly senior managers, be involved in supporting and/ or developing commercial business relationships. The staff development unit, similar to other colleges plans compliance and teacher training and leadership development programs. Programs have also been put in place to offer coaching and mentoring training for small groups of staff. However, despite the acknowledgment of this changing role, the Institute staff development unit has not yet been able to implement any programs to support Operations Managers in managing their changing roles nor to support their development of business related skills. Similar to the previous three case locations, the Staff Development unit offers training courses in how to use new communications and teaching technologies and how to implement the new performance development scheme.

3.2.5 Ensuring reliability, validity and dependability of case data

The construct validity of data requires that a case study include a set of operational measures to demonstrate how data is collected, stored and reported (Yin 2003, p. 34). Such operational measures can be used to replicate the study if required. The purpose of ensuring construct validity is to minimise subjectivity in the study. Construct validity is strengthened by the use of multiple sources of data, by the establishment of a chain of evidence which enables each step in the research process to be identified, traced and afforded appropriate attention. Construct validity is also enhanced by having the case study report reviewed by key informants (Yin 2003, p. 36). Data for the present research project was gathered from semi-structured interviews and organisational documents. The uses of these sources are explained further in the *Methods* section.

Similarly, the external validity of a case study is also enhanced by tactics which allow the findings of the study to be applied or generalised to similar contexts beyond the immediate case. That is, that the findings could apply in other contexts where the findings or 'theory' are anticipated to also apply (Yin 2003, p. 37). While survey research relies on statistical generalisation, case studies rely on analytical generalisation (Yin 2003, p. 37). This means that, in case studies, the researcher's overall aim is to determine how a particular set of results could apply to a broader theory. In the present research project, theories of situated and work related learning form the domains to which the results could later be applied. To strengthen a generalisation, a theory must be tested by replicating the findings in a second or third case location where the theory has specified that the same results should occur (Yin 2003).

Further, case reliability can be enhanced if the same case study can be conducted again, using the strategies and methods described in the case study design. However, as Merriam (1998) points out, 'social studies research designs involve human participants who interpret social situations differently

and this can make reliability through replication difficult'. Importantly, however, this present research project seeks to acknowledge, describe and interpret the social context in which the research problem, participant and researcher exist.

As Merriam (1998) observes, reliability in social research is virtually impossible because replication of social research is unlikely to record the same results. Several interpretations of the same data can be made, but all stand until directly contradicted by new evidence (Merriam 1998). Lincoln and Guba (cited in Merriam 1998, p. 205) however, suggest that an alternative way to view reliability in social research is to consider the dependability and consistency of results obtained from data. This way, rather than trying to achieve replication of data, confirmation is sought from others. Participants or peers, for example, review findings and verify that data and discussion makes sense to them.

To establish a chain of evidence (Yin 2003) and to enable this research case study to be repeated with traceable steps in either direction from initial research questions to the conclusion, a set of research procedures was developed as part of the research design. Dependability of data and findings is demonstrated in this study by the verification of outcomes by one of the participants during the final stages of analysis. The development of a concrete research strategy, the use of authentic contexts and the triangulation of data by the application of three different sources of data, rather than reliance on a single data source, have also increased the dependability of the research. That is, conclusions have been drawn from the perspectives of not only Operations Managers, but also from Staff Development Managers, and from the way work related learning is represented in a range of organisational documents.

Merriam (1998) suggests that generalisability may be a limitation of some cases. In this study, the possible limitations of generalisations drawn from data are acknowledged, but external validity, that is, the possible applicability of

findings to similar contexts has been strengthened by the inclusion of multiple cases. The applicability of the findings to a broad theory of work related learning is addressed by the consideration of ideas emanating from broad contemporary work related learning and facilitation literature. This approach was considered more useful, and consequently more appropriate, than applying a single case design or just focusing on unique themes.

To strengthen the external validity of the findings and to corroborate interpretations made, comments on the findings were sought from the college Operations Manager who participated in an initial data gathering interview at Oakman City College. In summary, the Operations Manager concurred with the synthesis of findings provided from each of the cases and concurred with the judgments made from the analysis of data. This participant also offered a number of comments concerning the role of an Operations Manager in facilitating work related learning, which the manager had formed since the initial interview. The validity and reliability of this case study are affirmed by its research design, multiple data sources, the data collection strategy, and a process for verification of findings.

3.2.6 The case study analysis strategy

The case study analysis and reporting strategies are underpinned by an interpretive research perspective. This means that the aims, objectives and intention of the research are shaped by an overall intention to inquire into, and uncover, the perspectives, experiences and actual practices of college Operations Managers in how they, as individuals and as employees of a large government organisation, facilitate informal on-the-job worker learning. At the heart of this research project is the need to identify, discuss and name the processes and practices of Operations Managers in facilitating informal work related learning and to give clarity and definition to the role. The interpretive research perspective and the interpretive analysis strategy are better suited to

achieve these aims than other research perspectives such as experimental, critical or postmodern perspectives.

Yin (2003, p. 109) cautions against beginning data collection without also determining an analytical strategy in the early stages of the research design. It was decided in the research design stage that a theoretical orientation (Yin 2003, p. 111) would be most appropriate for analyzing the case data. The theoretical orientation in this case study means the study has been framed by the arguments, rationale, background and purpose statement set out in the research design. The theoretical orientation approach focuses the analysis on the issues which are most relevant and important to answering the research questions and at the same time allows sufficient flexibility to incorporate other relevant issues including any opposing issues or explanations, as they arise from the conduct of the research and analysis of data. The decision to adopt a theoretical orientation to the analysis was taken for its value in guiding the sorting of the many relevant themes emanating from large amounts of interview and document data into a manageable number of key themes for more detailed discussion.

Using the 'theoretical orientation' approach, the analytic strategy was to, firstly, draw on the arguments and purpose statement made in the research design stage and the review of literature. Secondly, ideas were drawn from literature about how workers learn and how managers become involved in assisting workers to learn. These issues were noted and used to guide further reviews of literature concerning human resource development and the issues and challenges facing organisations building worker capability. The dearth of discussion in literature about actual manager approaches to facilitate ongoing work related learning also provided impetus for the research design to include methods which would elicit information about both organisational strategies and manager's personal perspectives. Such a deficiency was seen as an opportunity to ask specific questions about what Operations Managers actually

think and feel, and what actions they take to facilitate work related learning for others. This opportunity also guided the analysis of data and steered the identification of themes to reveal actual practices. Finally, my own work experience and understanding of college operational roles and responsibilities are acknowledged to have influenced the way in which I identified relevant and important issues to be coded and included in discussion of themes.

Case notes were made from interview transcriptions and documents. To begin the analysis, an initial 'first run' analysis of cases was conducted to identify a number of recurring and unique themes which would be useful in developing an understanding of the role of managers as facilitators of work related learning. These themes were then used to inform the final analytic strategy which was to analyse the full data set. The theoretical proposition strategy also allowed later consideration for a selection of 'how' and 'why' questions to be developed as the research progressed. While data collected from Staff Development Managers and organisational documents informs the case, the key role is that of the college Operations Manager and as such, is taken as the focus point and unit of analysis for the case.

Following Lofland and Lofland's (1995) and Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 60) approach to analysing qualitative data, interview transcripts and documents were coded in two stages to identify themes and key issues as they relate to Operations Manager practices in facilitation of work related learning. The first stage involved 'initial' coding to identify and label key themes and issues arising from each of the case interviews and case documents. The second stage involved a more 'focused' approach to refine categories of data and themes and to identify any concepts which could be excluded from the study. After completion of these two initial stages of coding, a process of further refining the coding system, based loosely on Miles and Huberman's (1995) model for analysing qualitative data, was applied. Codes were allocated to major themes such as context, perspectives, ways of thinking about others, processes,

activities, strategies, events, constraints, possible causes and effects, and themes noted earlier in literature. Examples of codes and sub-codes developed from initial analysis of interviews with Operations Managers and Staff Development Managers are included in Appendix 6.

To prepare for analysis, transcripts were converted into text tables with separations between interviewer and interviewee. As transcripts were reviewed, themes were noted and relevant codes applied to the text tables. This enabled easy identification of themes throughout the text and to sort data by these themes as required. Once the data had been sorted by code, particular issues were more readily identifiable.

The analysis stage was followed by noting observations from themes from the data and then discussing these themes in relation to issues arising in the work related learning, facilitation and organisational learning literatures. The drafting of analysis and discussion of themes acted as a catalyst for further consideration of the actual role of managers in facilitating work related learning. As a result of this drafting process, a number of additional themes and codes were added to the list of reference codes and applied to the text for further reference as required. Dey (1995, p.78 cited in Creswell, 2007) suggests the analytic phase is about 'insight, intuition and impression'; a type of learning from conducting preliminary analysis. In drafting observations and discussion from the initial analysis, key issues raised in the initial stages were more closely scrutinised. While the analysis process confirmed a number of the initial 'hunches' about manager activities in facilitating worker learning, it also challenged some of the initial thoughts on what it is that managers actually do to facilitate work related learning and how well equipped managers actually are in deploying facilitative practices.

In order to identify themes as they relate to the four cases, each case was analysed separately. A process of cross-case synthesis was used to identify common and contrasting themes and then to aggregate themes to draw conclusions from across the four cases (Yin 2003, p. 133). From this process, comparisons, differences and similarities between cases were made and this enabled judgments to be made about the relevance and importance of particular themes. The coding process adopted for analysing the cases is adapted from Creswell's (2007, p. 172) '*Template for Coding a Case Study (Using a Multiple or Collective Approach*')'. Essentially, the case context was outlined, followed by brief descriptions of cases to provide background. Themes were identified and coded from within cases.

Themes were then identified between or across cases to identify relevant similarities and differences. Observations were then made from analysis and discussion. Generalisations were then proposed and linked with the initial research arguments. This enabled the role of the Operations Manager to be illustrated and answers provided for the research questions of 'what is the role of an Operations Manager as a facilitator of work related learning?' and 'how does the organisation support this role?'

The analysis and discussion of data is presented in Chapter 4. A number of potential opportunities for TAFE NSW as an organisation to improve the way informal ongoing worker learning is acknowledged and understood as a non-teaching manager practice are put forward in Chapter 5. These opportunities are put forward as recommendations for managers, and the organisation as a whole, to improve the facilitation of informal on-the-job worker learning. The analysis and recommendations also give rise to a number of implications for managers and for training organisations which operate in similar ways to TAFE NSW. A representation of the relationships and outcomes of a manager facilitated work related learning process is proposed in Chapter 5 as a *'Framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning'*.

3.2.7 How the cases are reported

The holistic case findings are reported as a series of themes which have been judged to most effectively illustrate how and in what ways managers deploy strategies and apply skills to facilitate worker learning. Examples are drawn from each of the four cases. The report follows, in principle, Yin's (2003, p.148) format for reporting multiple cases. There are no separate chapters or sections for each case, but rather, the report consists of sections which focus on themes from the cross-cases analysis. Examples from individual cases are dispersed throughout the sections.

3.2.8 Ethical considerations

Approval to conduct research within the organisation of TAFE NSW was sought from both the University of Technology, Sydney and from TAFE NSW. An outline of the research aims and objectives, methods, timeframe and potential impact of the research on others was submitted to the University of Technology, Sydney, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) prior to commencing the study. UTS HREC approval was granted in April 2007 (Number 2007-57). A copy of this approval is included in Appendix 2. Approval to conduct the research with Operations and Staff Development Managers in TAFE NSW was obtained from the Deputy Director General TAFE and Community Education, Department of Education and Training in November, 2007. A copy of this approval is included in Appendix 3.

A number of ethical issues arise in the context of conducting social science research. Of key importance are issues which relate to the ways in which researchers enter and then leave a research site, their impact on participants and others and how they gather and represent personal information. More specifically, researchers need to be sensitive to the research site, to the needs and interests of participants, to minimise disruption, maintain confidentiality and

avoid deception (Creswell 2007, p. 44). Problems can also arise for case study inquiries in maintaining confidentiality of data and in how data is interpreted and represented. Other difficulties arise in terms of managing competition from different interest groups and difficulties in participants being unable to distinguish between data and the interpretation of data and analysis. The extent to which researchers become involved in the research itself, and what, and how information is published from a case study, also requires careful consideration by the researcher (Walker cited in Merriam 1998).

In the present research project, the potential risk of harm to participants and potential harm to the reputation and business of TAFE NSW and to NSW DEC as organisations was evaluated prior to conducting interviews and document reviews. Risk of harm to participants and to the organisation was expected to be very minimal. However, a number of potential issues were identified in the research proposal stages and were addressed during the conduct of the research project. These issues mainly concerned the possible disruption to manager's work because of their participation in interviews. There was a risk that the research might raise some deficiencies in current organisational approaches to work and learning and, if reported, this could shed a negative light on the organisation. There was a risk that managers may feel uncomfortable speaking openly about their practices or perspectives because of apprehension in projecting an incomplete or negative view of their work or of the organisation. There was also a risk that some participants might be identifiable by details outlined in the overviews of cases, locations or references to participant activities. The potential risks for participants were addressed by ensuring anonymity of participants and deidentifying locations and roles. Conducting research in the context of workplaces also raised a number of ethical issues for myself as the researcher and for the participants. As both a TAFE NSW employee and researcher my approach to interviews and to the analysis and reporting process was to assure and apply objectivity with respect to information shared by participants and obtained from organisational documents.

As the four Operations Managers were drawn from a relatively small pool of middle to senior level managers located in easily accessible areas of NSW and because of the unique nature of some of the Operations Managers' responsibilities, the confidential nature of the interview was reiterated at interviews. Managers were also assured that unique aspects of college locations would be de-identified in the final report. Interviewees were also assured they could withdraw from participation at any time and, that transcripts and recordings of their interviews would not be used in any way other than for the purposes of the research.

Safeguarding of participant privacy and their de-identification in the study been assured by allocating pseudonyms for participants and case locations. Some potentially distinguishing characteristics of case locations, roles and participants have been modified or changed to prevent identification of participants or actual case locations. To the best of my ability and available resources, information obtained from cases has been represented fairly, accurately and honestly. Verification of the accuracy of transcript information was sought from four interviewees. Two participants responded that they concurred with the content and overall intention of the interviews. Two participants did not reply to the request for verification due to work commitments.

To ensure the analysis of interviews and documents has been fairly represented, verification of my interpretations of manager roles, practices and perspectives was also sought from one of the four participant Operations Managers. The perspectives of this manager have been drawn upon extensively in discussion in this research project. Key findings and interpretations of manager practices were discussed in terms of their resonance and accurate representation of the role of an Operations Manager as a facilitator of work related learning. Relevant additional observations from the Operations Manager were also noted during this discussion. To add weight to the interpretations of manager practices and organisational influences on managers, verification of key findings was also sought from an Operations

Manager who was not otherwise involved in the research. Both managers agreed with interpretations made and endorsed the general concepts being put forward as a way to better understand the Operations Manager role, the influences on the role and the way in which the organisation views and supports the role. The methods used to collect data are outlined in the next section.

3.3 Methods

The case study data collection methods of semi-structured interviews and the review of a number of relevant strategic departmental documents were chosen for their value in enabling the research problem to be looked at in a more holistic way than would be possible if only one type or source of data had been used. A triangulated data collection strategy incorporating semi-structured interviews with Operations Managers and Staff Development Managers and the review of organisational documents strengthens the data source with a number of different perspectives and thus also strengthens the claims made from data analysis. The case study approach with simultaneous use of two different data collection methods and ability to use these methods to look at the role from different angles is anticipated to bring some strength to the analysis and outcomes of the study.

Quantitative methods or singular data source methods, such as in depth interviews, were considered inadequate for the generation of the type of subjective manager experiences that were anticipated to be necessary to answer the research questions. While a quantitative research strategy could provide a range of numeric indicators and statistical representation of managers' experiences against predetermined criteria, this type of strategy was considered unsuitable for providing the type of contextual and individual experiential information required.

3.3.1 Selection of participants

As outlined in the *Introduction*, participants in this study include Operations Managers and Staff Development Managers working in TAFE NSW colleges. The focus of the study however, is the role of the college Operations Manager. Operations Managers in this study are middle and senior level managers in large colleges located in metropolitan and regional areas of NSW. For the purposes of this study a large college is defined as a college enrolling over 8,000 students annually and with large numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff.

Participants in this study also include four Institute Staff Development Managers. Staff Development Managers are responsible for the strategic planning and delivery of programs to support the training and development of all staff, that is, teaching and non-teaching staff who work in the cluster of colleges which make up an Institute. The role of Staff Development Managers was included in the design to provide their perspectives on how Operations Managers are supported to create and provide ongoing learning opportunities for others in the context of day-to-day work.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five College Operations Managers. Four Operations Managers represent four case colleges. The interview with a fifth Operations Manager was included because she had only recently transferred from the position of College Operations Manager, to another position within the department. This manager's experience and perspective were anticipated to provide valuable insights into the role of a manager in a large vocational college. This interview is treated as representative of the college where this manager was previously employed. The

interview procedure and questions for College Operations Managers are presented in Appendix 7.

Interviews were also conducted with six Institute Staff Development Managers. At two case locations the Staff Development Manager and the Staff Development Director were interviewed, but these have been combined into one interview representative of one case location. Interviews were conducted primarily over two months to minimise the influence of any possible organisational changes implemented during the period of the data collection. Interviews were arranged and conducted face-to-face in the participant's office in colleges. The interview procedure and questions for Staff Development Managers are presented in Appendix 8.

Prior to conducting interviews participants were contacted and an overview of the purpose of the study and the topic were provided. This was followed by an email to each to confirm arrangements for the interview and to reiterate the purpose of the interview, my interests, aims and the context of the study. Recognising the busy role of managers and the limitations of a 45 min-60 min interview, the email also included a brief outline of what would be discussed in the interview. A copy of the Participant Consent form was emailed to each participant and their consent collected prior to conducting interviews. One interview with a staff Development Manager was conducted by phone at the convenience of the manager.

The interview process followed Foddy's (1993) 'Topic, Applicability and Perspective' (TAP) paradigm for conducting interviews. The field and topic of the research were explained to participants, along with my interests in the field of work related learning, as a researcher and manager. The arguments supporting the relevance of the study to contemporary workplace contexts were outlined at the beginning of the interviews. Consistent with an interpretive research perspective, questions were structured to encourage interviewees to

discuss their own individual experiences of how, and in what ways, they facilitate work related learning. This enabled other issues relevant and important to the interviewee, to be brought into the discussion, and this helped explain some current practices and procedures.

The first round of interviews at Blue Bay College were tested for suitability, and modified where relevant for interviews in the subsequent two case locations. In the fourth case location, interview questions were varied slightly, with the intention of building on the themes that emerged from preliminary analysis of previous interviews.

Interviews were transcribed into text. Themes, key issues and my own comments about the case data were transferred to a table which could be used to sort the data. The same process was followed for each of ten individual interviews. The four cases presented eight interviews. At two case locations, an additional interview was conducted. At one location an interview was conducted with an Operations Manager who had recently occupied the role in a large college within one of the case locations, but had just moved to another position at the time of the interview. This manager's contribution was valuable, and has been included in the analysis and discussion as a second Operations Manager at one case location. An additional interview was also conducted with a Staff Development Director who was employed at one of the case locations. At a third case site, two Staff Development Managers were interviewed together. Data from this interview is analysed and discussed as a single interview.

Two 'follow up' interviews with two Operations Managers from two of the original case locations were also included in the data collection strategy. One interview was conducted six months after the first interview and the second was conducted approximately twelve months after the original interviews. The follow up interviews were considered not to impact negatively on either participant, nor on the department's request that data collection be completed within six

months. The purpose of these additional interviews was to discuss if, in the preceding twelve months, Operations Managers had been involved in any other forms of facilitative learning strategies, and wished to make further comments about their experiences. One of these interviews was conducted face-to-face, and one by phone at the convenience of both the participants. Overall, a total of twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed to inform the holistic case. A sample of an interview transcription with an Operations Manager is presented in Appendix 9.

3.3.3 Document reviews

The review included documents which relate to different operational levels within the organisation, such as those applying to the Institute, college, unit and individual staff. At an organisational level, the review process included searches specifically intended to identify:

a. evidence that the organisation had developed expectations for non-teaching managers to provide ongoing work related learning opportunities for workers

and

b. evidence of how the organisation would provide support for managers to develop their learning facilitation skills.

At the manager level, the review included searches intended to identify:

a. evidence that managers need to actively identify learning needs for their workers
b. evidence that managers are required to facilitate work related learning for workers
c. evidence that managers need to develop and implement work related learning strategies for staff in response to identified needs.

Documents such as departmental and Institute strategic plans (for example, New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) 2008b; Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2009c), position descriptions (Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2009a) and staff development activity schedules (Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2008) were collected from websites, email or at the time of interviews. Many of the documents were reviewed for currency via websites throughout the analysis and research reporting process.

3.4 Other methodological issues

3.4.1 Challenges encountered in conducting case study research

Practical guides for researchers conducting case studies can be found in qualitative research method literature (Creswell 2007; Merriam 1998; Stake 1995; Yin 2003). This literature describes the need for researchers to make early decisions about case aims, objectives, purpose, type and design. In planning and conducting the early stages of a new case study a number of challenges in using case study methods for workplace based research became apparent. Of significance was the apparent interconnectedness of each stage of the research. Early in the case design stages, decisions were made about the aim, purpose, context and location for the case study and this gave focus to the study and some certainty about data sources while alleviating potential challenges arising from a lack of direction. It was not until the data collection commenced that the importance of being aware of the potential impact of the research on both the participants and the organisation became apparent. While Operations Managers were interested in being involved in the research and keen to participate, their work commitments were significant, and this acted as a

reminder that care was needed to ensure interviews and associated introductory emails minimised disruption to their work.

The approved timeframe of six months for collecting interview data from the organisation also became a logistical challenge for a case study design which incorporated incremental stages for building understanding through iterative processes with participants at case sites. While a six month time frame was reasonable and appropriate for data collection for this case study design it also meant that initial analysis and follow up interviews also had to be arranged quickly to fit within the specified timeframe. This required substantial work to conduct analysis and iteratively build understanding from the data and literature in a relatively short period of time. This was not a significant challenge but is noted here as an issue of potential concern for constructing a similar study.

At interviews, a succinct overview of the research, the background, purpose and how confidentiality of participation and other ethical considerations would be maintained, were provided to participants. Interviews of 45-60 minutes were anticipated to be appropriate and sufficient portions of time to be afforded in the busy schedule of managers. However, this amount of time was found to be somewhat limiting for obtaining the anticipated rich and detailed perspectives on a multifaceted topic, especially one which had not been afforded any significant attention in the past. Managers with many years experience were found to be very willing to discuss the issues at length. Staff Development Managers were also very keen to discuss the topic, two of who remarked that it was 'good to see some research in the area on non-teaching staff' being undertaken in the organisation. They were keen to share and explain their experiences and perspectives on this role.

Interviews were carefully planned to be conducted in a way which both prepared participants for the intended discussion but also in a way which best

suited participants and their work obligations. As researcher, my 'position' is at the centre of the research process and as such is not detached from the research process. However, it was acknowledged also that interviews are 'co-elaborated acts' where data is gathered as a collaborative process rather than an act by the researcher alone (Miles & Huberman 1994). Bearing this in mind, the research design, particularly the data collection stages were planned to foster, objectively, the co-participant role of managers in the data collection and verification stages.

A benefit of conducting research in the context of a researcher's work organisation is an overall familiarity with, and experience of issues raised and discussed by participants. As an employee and researcher there were benefits in having acquired a working knowledge of the aims and objectives of the organisation, the type of projects currently engaging Operations Managers, and familiarity with the language and acronyms used in interviews and in documents. Organisational experience in this case, enhanced the data collection process and later the interpretation, analysis and discussion.

However, consideration has been given to my role and position within the research strategy and design. To position myself solely as a researcher was difficult given my familiarity with the role of participants and my past acquaintances with some participants. During the interviews and document reviews, any potential biases and preconceived ideas were continuously considered for their influence on case analysis and interpretation processes. Time frames and expectations were managed and where required, modified appropriately to meet agreements and research conditions. University and organisational ethics approvals were adhered to in case study management. The search of organisational documents included documents from a range of levels within the organisation, websites and internal data bases. Accessing internal documents was more difficult than had been anticipated. While several case sites provided a range of documents at the conclusion of interviews, some

did not. Follow up contacts with participants created further interruption to the work of the participants and did not always produce access to documents. To minimise disruption to managers, access to documents from some case sites was foregone in favour of obtaining other relevant information from websites and more readily available publications.

Challenges encountered in the planning and data collection stages in this case study design included both methodological and logistical issues. The challenges were not considered insurmountable by myself and there has been no indication that any were unacceptable from the point of view of the organisation. Nevertheless, the issues encountered in conducting this study have been considered carefully and strategies put in place to minimise any possible adverse impact on participants or on the organisation. A limitation of interviews, as a data collection method, is that it relies on respondents providing information about all aspects of the issue being discussed. It is assumed that managers in this study have provided subjective observations, perspectives and opinions to contribute professionally to this study. They may not necessarily confirm or refute perspectives in contemporary literature.

3.4.2 Locating myself in the research

My epistemological position, that is, how as the researcher I understand what constitutes knowledge in the context of this study, is that knowledge will be built from the perspectives offered by others at a particular point in time. The position taken is that my own experiences of work and learning will influence the way work related learning practices are represented in the study. This study acknowledges that perspectives offered by participants through verbal, non verbal and written documents represent individual understandings from which specific experiences are recorded and discussed. The intention of the interpretive framework is to treat individual perspectives and experiences as particular valuable subjective sources of knowledge and that generalizations

could potentially be made from these sources and applied in other organisations.

This research project assumes a subjective ontology. That is, the research acknowledges at the outset, that there are multiple realities for both the researcher and research participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005). The position is taken that reality in this study is socially and personally constructed, rather than objective and consistent. The study presents the individual and subjective lived experiences of Operations Managers through my own interpretations and understandings of the practices of facilitation of informal, work related learning in the context of the College operations workplace.

In this chapter, the research method, design and strategies have been outlined. An overview of the cases, and methodological and logistical challenges facing participants, the researcher and the organisation, have been explained. In Chapter 4, following, key themes emerging from the cases are identified and discussed to illustrate current facilitative practices of college Operations Managers and the types of challenges facing managers in facilitating work related learning.

CHAPTER 4: CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents outcomes of the analysis of cases and discussion of themes concerning the role of an Operations Manager facilitating informal work related learning for workers in TAFE NSW colleges. The focus of the study is the role of a College Operations Manager managing large teams of administrative, technical and service staff. As outlined in the Research Methodology and Methods chapter, the data analysed and discussed in this study emanates from interviews with Operations Managers, Institute Staff Development Managers and information derived from a range of organisational documents as they relate to non-teaching operations. The documents are drawn upon to provide some indication of the ways in which TAFE NSW Institutes support managers to facilitate informal worker learning. Work related learning literature is referred to in discussions about findings from cases.

Terms such as 'organisation' and 'organisational level' are taken to mean the view or position of the organisation as portrayed in strategic and operational documents. Strategic documents are taken to mean an aggregation of the collective view of senior directors and other executives who are responsible for setting and implementing strategic directions at an Institute and college level. A 'worker' means any staff who report to or work closely under the direction or guidance of an Operations Manager. An operations worker may be a direct report, team member or an employee with whom the manager works or guides in relation to organisational projects, committees or other activities. The term 'the manager's role' denotes an aggregation of actions, that is, strategies and skills, context and expectations as they apply to managers in assisting workers to learn on-the-job. It is acknowledged that 'strategies' and 'skills' sometimes involve similar actions.

The analysis and discussion in this chapter presents an interpretation of evidence gathered from cases which provide a representation of the actual role of a line manager in facilitating work related learning for others. Key issues arising from themes are drawn together in discussion at the end of each section. The chapter concludes with a number of observations emerging from the whole case, about managers roles in facilitating worker learning.

Case characteristics summarised

Data has been drawn from four separate cases represented by four vocational education and training colleges in NSW. The colleges are referred to hereafter as:

- Blue Bay College (case 1)
- Timbers College (case 2)
- Oakman City College (case 3)
- Mid-State College (case 4)

The four cases were initially analysed separately. Relevant themes were then aggregated from all of the cases, through a process of cross-cases synthesis. The following table (*Table 1)* provides an overview of key characteristics, similarities and differences between cases.

Table 2: Summary of key characteristics, similarities and differences between cases

	Blue Bay College	Timbers College	Oakman City College	Mid-State College
Level of seniority and location of Operations Manager	Middle level manager in large regional college.	The previous and current managers were/are both senior level managers in a large metropolitan college, with some unique delivery and support staff teams. (Two senior level managers were interviewed at Timbers College).	Senior level manager in large metropolitan college.	Senior level manager in a large regional college with Institute responsibilities.
The organisation's documented expectations	Requirement to train staff and build teams.	Requirement to develop staff.	Requirement to develop staff, show leadership and manage training.	Requirement to develop staff skills.
Motivations	Interests lie mainly in training and developing staff skills but are oriented to compliance training and work training to 'get the job done within budget and on time'.	Interests of both managers lie in developing staff skills to work effectively and prepare for organisational change. Are committed to developing worker knowledge for individual capability and competence and	Interests lie in building social networks among staff teams and business networks within the community. Is committed to developing staff working knowledges for individual	Interests lie in developing staff learning goals and building skills to contribute to supporting the teaching and learning effort. Is committed to developing staff learning

	Blue Bay College	Timbers College	Oakman City College	Mid-State College
	Focuses on immediate learning needs of workers but is also aware of the need for longer term capability development strategies.	organisational benefit.	and organisational benefit.	goals and awareness of the need to contribute to college goals.
Manager strategies in facilitating day-to-day worker learning	Manager facilitates compliance and systems training and some focus on managing development through performance measures. Takes an overall operational, approach characterised by actions to provide required training and to direct and monitor worker learning.	Both managers focus on customer service skill development 'to get the job done'. Are proactive in trialing job rotations and communicating through team meetings. Are committed to building worker knowledges for productive and independent work. Both take an overall functional approach to learning which is characterised by making changes to staffing arrangements, guiding and assisting workers to improve work related knowledge, understanding of processes	Manager proactively plans actions to create social spaces. Has a customer service focus. Facilitates the formation of practice communities. Plans to prepare staff for future change. Is committed to building worker experiences and working knowledge for individual capability development and organisational benefits. Takes both a functional and a strategic approach to learning characterised by making changes to assist workers and plans	Seeks cooperation from staff. Plans to prepare staff for future change. Takes a holistic quality improvement approach. Plans staff goal setting and encourages learning from, and with, others through external conferences and contacts. Is committed to building working knowledge for individual capability development and organisational benefits.

	Blue Bay College	Timbers College	Oakman City College	Mid-State College
		and implications.	longer term strategies.	Takes both a functional and a strategic approach to learning characterised by making changes to assist workers and plans longer term strategies.
Skills applied by managers to support worker learning strategies	Arranges training. Closely manages budget and staff activities. Sets expectations and tasks to 'get jobs done' on time. Monitors the work of older workers and coaches younger workers.	One manager trialed a job rotation plan although failed to entirely meet worker or manager expectations. The other manager sets up challenges and monitors performance. Both aim to ensure clear team communication and model good practices.	Builds social connections. Models developmental practices. Applies a 'need to know staff' approach and the benefits in integrating work and learning across established boundaries. Actively seeks to communicate with, and to be accessible to others.	Arranges and negotiates job rotations, conducts annual conferences, develops learning plans, encourages membership in professional associations, facilitates forums for staff and focuses communication on worker contribution to strategic goals and building a community atmosphere. Values staff contributions.
Aiding and supporting factors.	Facilitation is aided by the provision of training programs and workshops provided by the Staff Development Unit.	Training programs and workshops such as mentoring, coaching, staff forums and online learning programs.	Training programs, for example, mentoring and coaching, use of new technologies and how to conduct performance development.	Training programs, for example, use of new technologies.

	Blue Bay College	Timbers College	Oakman City College	Mid-State College
	The provision for study leave in the manager's employment award. Engagement of some younger workers.			
Constraining factors	Limited time. Limited engagement of some older workers. Limited overt support from the Staff Development unit which largely takes a 'find out for yourself' approach to informal learning for non-teaching staff. Manager's perception is that acknowledgment of the role from senior managers is limited.	Limited time. Some less than optimal worker/job fit. Some restrictive policies Some worker fear of change. Concerns about engagement and motivation. Challenging worker personalities. Manager's perception is that the organisation's policies and procedures do not sufficiently support managers to effectively facilitate on-the-job informal worker learning.	Limited time. Staff engagement and motivation. Limited guidance from some senior managers. Feeling of working in a vacuum. Worker / learner fears of change and identifying as learners. Manager's perception of insufficient organisational commitment to ongoing learning for non-teaching staff.	Limited time. Some restrictive personalities of workers and other managers. Insufficient focus by the organisation on building non-teaching manager skills in current business related processes and literacies.

Themes constructed from the case data

Three key themes, which most effectively represent the expected and actual practices of Operations Managers in facilitating work related learning for workers in college Operational teams, have been identified from the cases. Each theme is discussed for its relevance in bringing to light existing manager practices in facilitating work related learning, and how these practices help answer the research questions. The three themes concern:

1. why and how managers become involved in worker capability development
2. the types of strategies deployed and skills applied by managers to facilitate informal work related learning and navigate challenges
3. how Operations Managers manage the context of work to optimise learning

4.1 Theme 1: Why and how Operations Managers become involved in facilitating worker learning

To better understand what Operations Managers do to facilitate ongoing informal learning it is useful to note how and why managers become involved in this type of activity. Reasons for their involvement point primarily to the responsibilities of managers to fulfill the requirements of their positions and to fulfill their obligations to contribute to addressing the organisation's capability development strategies. A prominent reason however, emanates from the interest and sense of commitment of managers to assist workers to build on-the-job work related skills and knowledges so that individuals and teams can work efficiently and productively. Typical reasons for managers to become involved in facilitating work related learning are outlined in the following two sections.

4.1.1 Contributing to the organisation's strategic capability goals

Analysis of departmental (DEC), Institute and college related documents indicate all staff including Operations Managers are expected to be involved in some way in contributing to the development of worker capabilities. Strategic documents such the *NSW DET Corporate Plan 2008-2011* (New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) 2008a) and the *NSW DET Strategic Human Resources Plan* (New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) 2008b) set goals to deliver education and training services to the State of NSW. Both plans include specific strategies to develop the capability of staff to support the delivery of teaching and learning to college students. The capability development related strategies specify that DEC, as an organisation, will create work environments which support the work and professional development of staff by sustaining job engagement, promoting collaborative networks, and providing access to professional development. The *DET Strategic Human Resource Plan 2008-2011* specifically sets goals to 'develop the capability of managers across the organisation' and to 'position Human Resources as a strategic partner to achieve the organisation's priorities'.

These strategies are further translated in various TAFE NSW Institute strategic and annual plans which indicate for example, goals 'to encourage development of expertise that meets organisational and customer needs', 'to expand and improve the capability of people' and 'to develop skills and capacities of staff to support students with diverse learning needs' (Technical and Further Education (TAFE NSW) 2009b, 2009c). This research project takes the view that while not explicitly stated, much of this capability development and management of supportive learning conditions lies with line managers who manage large teams.

College Operations Managers are specifically required to put in place strategies to build staff capabilities. Their position statements indicate, for example, that

they must 'provide opportunities for multi-skilling and improved customer service', 'lead, manage, motivate and develop the capability of staff…' and '…develop and maintain an innovative learning culture where individual team contributions are valued and maximised'. Adherence to these obligations and the intention to address these responsibilities is evident in Operations Manager approaches to their day-to-day management of staff and tasks. These approaches are discussed in the next section.

4.1.2 Applying a developmental approach to support worker learning

Interview data indicates consensus among Operations Managers that they feel well placed within the organisation to make significant and important contributions to the ongoing capability development of both workers, and of the organisation. They all indicate a strongly developmental orientation to planning and assisting ongoing worker learning, and they all actively seek to create conditions which they feel will support informal on-the-job learning. This 'developmental approach' is illustrated by the actions taken by the Operations Manager at Timbers College; a large metropolitan college delivering programs supported by teams of both skilled and unskilled workers.

Belinda, the Operations Manager at Timbers College sees her role in ongoing facilitating worker learning as twofold. Belinda seeks to manage the smooth running of the college and at the same time encourages and creates an environment which supports ongoing learning as a way to add value to the capability of the organisation. Belinda also sees a large part of her role as managing emergencies, 'putting out spot fires' and managing people. But she also uses these circumstances to encourage workers to be involved, solve problems and develop new skills, which they can then draw upon for experience, in developing their own future progression, if, and as, required. Belinda describes her role as:

' *…an awful lot of it's on the spot fire fighting and conflict resolution and trying to do the best by (staff) …making sure the staff as much as possible are encouraged to move into…following their own career path... I think it's about trying to create an environment where they can actually get experience into areas they'd like to move into'.* Belinda

Significantly, Belinda is aware of the need to guide learning in areas which interest staff and support their career development; not just areas which only promise gains for the organisation.

Similarly, the Operations Manager at Oakman City College, Chris, sees part of his role ensuring the knowledge base of workers is current and relevant for operating within the continuously changing work environment. Chris explains his role in facilitating worker learning is not just about sending team members to attend Staff Development courses, to learn for example, how to use new computer software. But rather, his role is to assist workers to create meaning from their day-to-day activities to expand their experiences and to see their place within the wider organisational context. The first step for Chris, in developing staff, is to firstly identify links between everyday work and the strategic directions of the organisation. He then sets his own goal to communicate and promote the strategic directions to staff so they are aware of how their role contributes to the sustainability of the organisation. Chris states explicitly that his role is:

'… about finding links with the Corporate Plan and Corporate Vision and promoting these (links)'. Chris

Mark, The Operations Manager at Mid-State College aims to blend programs to suit different teams, and to boost the self-esteem and confidence of staff including those with both low level and high level literacies.

'...it's about cooperation, support and taking a holistic approach,...looking at the needs of learners and facilitators, a quality improvement approach, the learning support, cultural support, respect, ...people feel valued and

> *there is a sense of campus community atmosphere which wasn't necessarily here a few years ago'*

> and

> *'...it's about managing that blend and getting the best out of people'.* Mark

There are parallels, in this example, with what Beckett (1999, p. 86) referred to as 'organic' learning conditions for supporting worker learning. For Beckett, organic learning conditions are those which emphasise collaboration and people development to optimise worker learning.

Taking a different approach, Heather, the Operations Manager at the smaller, Blue Bay College applies a number of strategies but her most prominent approach is deployed as a way to address a current pressing need. It involves arranging for staff to participate in a number of required training programs to meet legislative and policy obligations. A large part of Heather's approach is to ensure that staff are equipped to operate effectively with new systems, are aware of new operating requirements such as Child Protection, Work health and Safety obligations and that staff are well equipped to manage new administrative systems. Heather takes a largely operational approach to learning to ensure compliances requirements are met and to 'get jobs done' with the teams at her college, '*on time and on budget*'.

Belinda, Chris and Mark take a longer term developmental view for non-teaching staff. It is the 'further 'development' of worker skills, knowledge and experiences, which they know is necessary for workers to operate effectively and productively in the context of the changing college Operations workplace. Chris points out that there needs to be more to staff development than sending staff to training courses:

' …(staff development programs) are part of our business but there isn't that development beyond that type of program…part of it has to be further development …how to put the world together in a meaningful way'. Chris

Apart from brief references to providing mentoring and coaching in a recently implemented staff performance management and development scheme (New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) 2010) there is little to suggest, that the organisation has given much consideration as to how managers should address the organisation's expectations, or manage facilitative learning strategies. A review of the organisation's human resource management policies and procedures also suggests the organisation, generally, has little to say about manager facilitation of informal work related learning. Instead, organisational documents, and discourse, tend to privilege formal Staff Development managed learning programs, and self-directed formal learning, over informal learning activities. This is surprising given the core business of TAFE NSW is to train and prepare people to develop their skills to learn on-the-job, and, further, to build awareness of how to work effectively, in a range of capacities and environments.

Such a deficiency adds to the argument in this research project, that the role of the line manager as a facilitator of work related learning has not yet been widely embraced by the organisation. The need to engage workers to keep up with the pace of change in the use of equipment, new systems and changing policies, and hence, learn on-the-job, is only recognised by the inclusion of goals to develop worker capabilities. Managers actively seek to help others understand the local context and to utilise day-to-day events at work as learning opportunities. They aim to make clear to workers how their work links with the organisation's goals. Operations Managers are highly aware of the importance to the organisation of positive outcomes from informal worker learning. This is consistent with observations made by Smith (2006) and others that managers who understand the local context are usually well placed to facilitate useful, on-the-job learning experiences for workers.

Evidence confirms Operations Managers are tasked with roles to develop staff and clearly, actively seek to fulfill these roles in various ways. As will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section, the expectation and commitment to facilitate informal and ongoing worker learning, presents some difficulties for Operations Managers. Despite the lack of explicit guidance, Operations Managers' motivations and commitment to ongoing development of staff skills, and knowledge, appears largely undeterred. The range of strategies they deploy and skills they apply to facilitate ongoing worker learning, is discussed in the next section.

4.2 Theme 2: The strategies deployed and skills applied by managers to facilitate worker learning and navigate challenges

The strategies and skills Operations Managers apply to facilitate work related learning for college Operations teams highlight managers' concerns for understanding team member interests and abilities, and, how they will provide conditions for supporting both individual and group learning. This discussion enables a more detailed view of the facilitative learning role of Operations Managers. It also provides further rationale for ways to facilitate worker learning which are put forward in Chapter 5. For the purposes of this discussion, a 'strategy' is taken to mean an approach or a plan for learning. A 'skill' means a particular ability or application of an expertise.

In interviews Operations Managers indicated a high level of awareness of the need for workers to work productively and collaboratively with others to maintain productive work practices and to develop solid understanding about what, and how, work needs to be done. The key aim of managers is to set up and maintain conditions where workers are encouraged to create, retain, share and further develop their work related knowledges. The need to keep up with the changing work environment was one was one of the main reasons they needed

to facilitate ongoing worker learning. Operations Managers proceed to find ways to integrate opportunities for work related learning in the day-to-day work for their teams and others. They put in place strategies to manage the context of work to maximise social collaboration among team members and to create new opportunities for workers to become engaged in different ways of working. Operations Managers apply a range of skills in their day-to-day work to operationalise the strategies they develop and deploy.

Strategies and skills applied by Operations Managers are often closely interconnected, making separation of strategies and skills difficult. But broadly, Operations Managers in this study deploy strategies to:

- identify worker learning needs
- actively seek to 'know' their staff by understanding their interests motivations and limitations
- create communication streams with staff to develop a workplace culture which supports the sharing of information
- create conditions which enable relevant forms of collaboration between co-workers
- enable workers to build awareness of how they contribute to the goals of the organisation
- create relevant challenges and opportunities to extend the knowledge and experience of workers including implementing job rotations and some job shadowing
- make changes, where possible, to physical work spaces to enable and support workers to make social connections with each other and to enable workers to observe and interact with a wider range of day-to-day activities
- arrange training and other formal learning activities to ensure legislative compliance in, for example, machinery operation licenses, food handling certification, equipment operating procedures, Work Health and Safety (WH&S) and Child Protection awareness

Operations Managers apply skills to:

- communicate on a range of levels and in a range of ways
- model co-worker collaboration
- mentor, coach and guide team members and others
- plan, organise and make judgments about learning related opportunities
- engage and motivate staff to participate and adapt to new ways of working
- encourage, demonstrate and lead effective social interaction between workers to build awareness and appreciation for the work of others
- anticipate engagement and outcomes, and make changes to the work and the work environment as required
- utilise their own (manager) networks and local business and community members to support their own learning in order to effectively facilitate the learning of others
- realign and rotate staff around appropriate positions to ensure 'a good job fit' and to expand worker experience by guiding staff to take on new responsibilities
- create a community atmosphere
- demonstrate that they value staff

The cross-case synthesis allowed the types of strategies and skills to be identified and these are outlined in the sections following.

4.2.1 Understanding worker learning needs and interests

A key skill for Operations Managers is to understand worker learning needs and interests. Many of the listed strategies and skills strongly suggest a need to recognise that productive work needs to be coupled with recognition of the effects of ongoing changes to the work environment. Managing such changes requires that managers are able to apply particular skills to capitalise on the often competing priorities of work and worker learning; not to exploit workers but rather, to 'get the best' from both workers and the changing environment.

Team meetings and committees are forums used by managers as mechanisms for listening to, speaking with and 'getting to know' staff. Formal and informal meetings provide opportunities to see, hear and make judgments about worker capabilities in terms of, for example, how they plan, communicate and coordinate activities with others. By understanding more about team member interests and skills, managers are also better equipped to develop appropriate learning related activities to assist workers to develop their context based knowledges and ability to work effectively with change and uncertainty (Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993, p. 10). Much can be learned from understanding, or at least knowing something about a learner's personal experiences, and the ways in which they give meaning to these experiences. This in not to say that learners necessarily need to be assessed and categorised into learning types or styles, but rather, the cases in this research project show that managers feel it is important to develop an awareness of learner's individual interests and experiences as a way to improve the engagement of workers in learning related opportunities. As Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) suggest, much can be lost by ignoring the uniqueness of each person's history and their ways of experiencing the world.

Another way Operations Managers attempt to build co-worker's appreciation for each other's work is to encourage staff to participate in work related social gatherings and networking activities. They say that social connectivity between workers and themselves assists each party to build awareness and improve understanding of each other's work. Operations Managers observe that working in close proximity to others fosters collaboration and, subsequently, encourages the workers to share their experience and general operating information about 'who does what', 'how' and 'issues already encountered'. An important part of working closely with others is that it allows workers to collectively gather and retain experiences and histories of what works and what does not. The sharing of local knowledges is valuable, even essential, to workers and to teams and managers.

Lara, the Operations Manager who had been the previous manager at Timbers College for several years just prior to the commencement of this research project places a high value on building her understanding of workers strengths and weaknesses and how far she can go to challenge different team members.

> *'I spend a fair bit of time getting to understand and see the personalities in the different teams and identifying where their strengths are and looking at capabilities; whether you can actually push them to gain greater skills or give them opportunities that will actually challenge them, because irrespective of the level of capability you need to keep the staff engaged. Once they become disengaged, they then become a liability, and this infects others'.* Lara

Similarly, Chris, the Operations Manager at Oakman City College, and Mark at Mid-State College both emphasise the need to foster a community atmosphere where team members work effectively together:

> *'It's about creating an environment where those communities can form and I think it's about knowing the people'.* Chris

All of the Operations Managers' approaches indicate that they know it is imperative to maintain worker engagement, to not only maintain productivity, but also to reduce the risk of workers not further developing their skills and experience and thereby becoming less productive workers. As Lara has indicated workers who become disengaged with on-the-job learning can be a liability for both the group and for the organisation. Disruption to planned learning activities, by disengaged workers, is mentioned by Operations Managers.

A key assumption about situated learning and communities of practice theory is that group members work harmoniously and willingly together to share what they have learned. The possibility that members might change the way they think and feel about a particular task, challenge group processes or disrupt collaboration among the community as a whole, is however, largely overlooked by Lave and Wenger (1991). They note that the process of progression through stages of learning in communities of practice, and the nature of communities of

practice themselves, operate in ways which can be both empowering and disempowering for members. But there is an overall assumption that community members will maintain ongoing and positive commitments to a group. In the two preceding examples, the Operations Managers draw attention to the need to understand the interests, motivations and learning requirements of workers. Both managers are aware that negative behaviours among members in practice communities and other groups can present challenges for the effective functioning of their communities.

4.2.2 Creating communication streams and modelling good practice

Operations Managers in all cases have acquired many years experience managing multiple tasks and projects with large teams. They are highly aware of the need to deploy multiple strategies to effectively facilitate on-the-job learning for diverse teams. Belinda, the current, and Lara the previous Operations Manager at Timbers College see that an important part of their role requires the raising of worker awareness and understanding of both day-to-day operational and longer term strategic matters. A key element of the Operations Manager role for all Operations Managers is to effectively provide a range of verbal and written advice and information to team members and other workers. They do this by email, chairing committees and team meetings, with individuals and groups, addressing annual conferences and producing a range of written documents. They draw on their broad skills and experiences in managing large and diverse teams to deploy communication strategies to address and engage staff on a range of levels and for various purposes. Committees and work groups are also forums for team members to discuss their work, challenges, their achievements and outcomes.

To raise awareness of the work of others and to create opportunities to expand workers' knowledges, Belinda plans and arranges job rotations and invites workers to participate in different ways in teams, with different work tasks and in

college or Institute projects. A key role for Mark, Belinda and Lara is to encourage participation, to guide, model and demonstrate effective practices. Operations Managers often draw on their own skills and experiences to implement fair and equitable practice, to encourage and engage others in ways which they anticipate will extend and support worker learning. One way to achieve this is to clearly communicate interest in learning by others. Mark models his interest in and support for staff learning by attending training programs with staff. Mark notes:

> *'I think if you show that you are learning by your attendance it's a form of leadership saying 'I think this (the program and the learning) is important'.* Mark

Similarly, Belinda, and Heather at Blue Bay College, take on roles in facilitating and some direct guiding and advising their team members to help them to work more efficiently, particularly in the current environment of change. Belinda assists others to fill gaps in understanding, and, importantly, fosters the sharing of information and ideas:

> *'...every Friday morning I have a meeting with all my section heads, regardless of whether they come (directly) under me or not ... that started about two years ago...because I found some areas felt like they were siloed…they gave no understanding of what was happening around the college generally. We go around the table and say 'right, what's happening in your area?, what are the problems?, can anyone help? And often someone will say, look we can help you with that, we will send this person to help....'.Or someone will say,' look we tried that in my area and it was really good...so it was sharing information and who can help and as a group we can resolve someone else's problem. They come back every week because they start to find out what's happening in the whole college; they start to understand, you know...'.*

> *and*

> *'If I find then that they (staff) have particular shortcomings and if I've got the skills...staff come to me and say I've stuffed up or whatever...can you show me how you did that...and I'll sit with them ... I'll show you a couple of short cuts or I'll show you how to do a formula without having to know how to do a formula.... I personally spend time with each manager… there's a little bit of one to one training,... but I have to say my time is extremely limited in what I can do. Sometimes I will buddy people up...I get Arlo, he's good at writing submissions so I say 'can you please help Sue so she knows how to do it'.* Belinda

Many of operations teams at Timbers and Mid-State Colleges are, however, physically separated from each other in various parts of large multi-facility campuses. To overcome this potential barrier to networking at work, Belinda and Mark set up annual forums for class support staff to discuss current issues and to remind staff about how their roles contribute to the goals of the organisation.

These types of strategies have largely worked well for Belinda in that she is able to provide a place and time for her staff to discuss their day-to-day activities, team projects and difficulties. Belinda also provides one-to-one training, mentoring and guidance for her managers. In this example Belinda actively attempts to cultivate a community of practice among her team. By bringing team members together to discuss their day-to-day issues, they more readily identify potential problems and solve difficulties as a group. Belinda's involvement is that of a collector of issues, a guide, demonstrator and community member. Belinda uses these forums and group meetings as avenues for workers to better understand the day-to-day work of colleagues, and, to develop awareness of changing circumstances and shifting priorities.

Similarly, for Heather at Blue Bay College, creating communication streams, training and guiding others is also an important part of setting up a learning environment. Training, modelling and mentoring are shared among team members, particularly as Heather's other work commitments do not allow here to allocate the amount of time to this process that she would like:

> 'We all do that (training and mentoring) *amongst ourselves. If we find something say on Outlook- we say 'oh do you know you can do this'. I'd have more one-on-one training with them and go through ok, what do you want to do, how would that help you in your position, where do you feel you are now…'.* Heather

The sharing of experience and transferring of knowledges about current practices are critical to maintaining continuity and progress in both work and in

learning. While training and guiding staff is also undertaken by co-workers the direct involvement of Operations Managers in facilitating workers to meet and discuss issues, and to see these as opportunities for building worker capabilities, is consistent across the colleges in this case study.

Strategic communication and collaboration skills are also applied by Chris, the Operations Manager at Oakman City College and by Mark at Mid-State College. Chris describes his college teams as having become fragmented over several years of changes in leadership and college strategic directions. To bring his teams back together, Chris has developed and implemented two specific learning related goals with his teams. The first goal is to put in place processes to re-establish the aims and objectives of his Operations team, and secondly, to address a specific organisational goal to raise the profile of the college in the local community. This latter goal is one which he feels will bring a significant 'cultural' change to the usual focus of college operations teams. Chris's aim is to use this process as an awareness building and business skills learning opportunity for staff. Chris combined his knowledge, experience, management, leadership and strategic communication skills to commence a process where workers and teams could start thinking differently about the relationship between the operations teams and their position within the broader local community.

Chris indicates he applies a strategic approach to bring his fragmented teams back together to work more collaboratively and to see how their roles contribute to the sustainability of the college and the local community. Chris explained:

> '...my focus this year has been to getting those edges back together again…focusing on what it is that we are here to support and do and find how we might do that. I think overall my focus is to embed the college in the district'. Chris

Lara, a previous Operations Manager at Timbers College also explains that she takes the position that communicating with workers to build their understanding

of the context and objectives of the organisation, and how workers' efforts contribute to these objectives, is a critical communication skill for her to fulfill her role. It is important to assist workers to understand underpinning principles and goals of the organisation and to use this knowledge as a way to further engage and broaden staff skill bases. She does this by applying and modifying her influencing skills to persuade staff to participate and engage in different day-to-day tasks and other projects as opportunities arise. Important considerations for facilitating learning through work are the way in which workers 'own' tasks, and outcomes.

Lara describes how she communicates with staff to build a developmental work environment:

> *'… the challenge is the to get them understanding all those things that are happening behind the scenes and in all those personalities, also getting them to respect you and listen to you so you need to be able to adjust your language and your approach and hook into the things that they will actually listen to and they will start to take notice. In that you can get them involved in other tasks across the college like OH&S and you can start to push them into doing training in those areas and start to get them engaged and giving them ownership of tasks across a broader spectrum. It gives them also something more than just the tag of being a Toolstore person or a Security Officer so they have that additional responsibility within their portfolio of work'.* Lara

Lara's interest in using work related learning as a way to boost worker engagement in day-to-day work is evident. Lara is also interested in broadening the scope of workers whose documented and day-to-day work practices are narrow and prescriptive. It is clear that Lara is concerned that the 'label' of 'Toolstores Officer' is too restrictive for the contemporary work environment. Her strategy is to broaden the scope of positions such as 'Toolstores Officer' and in doing this broaden the position holder's scope of activity and to widen potential participation in work and further learning related activities. This approach suggests a much more active orientation to facilitation of worker learning than simply 'managing workplace learning'. Clear management directions and competent interpersonal communication skills, and motivation, can assist

managers to lead change in organisations (Stace & Dunphy 2004, p. 155). Lara's active orientation towards implementing change to facilitate learning for Toolstores Officers aligns well with recent observations that workers, who perceive they are learning and are supported at work, are more likely to demonstrate a higher level of interest and engagement with work, than those who perceive they are not learning at work (Evans and Kersh in Gustavsson 2009, p. 255; McDermott & Carter 2010; Smith, Oczkowski & Selby-Smith 2008).

To summarise, the cases indicate that Operations Managers want to be competent in applying a range of behavioural, interpersonal communication and collaboration skills to facilitate on-the-job learning for others. Interpersonal communication, collaboration and team working skills are skills which, together, help workers and managers develop constructive relationships between each other and to create and sustain ongoing knowledge development. Cases indicate that managers apply and utilise their interpersonal communication skills in activities such as:

- modelling a 'learn to learn' working environment
- taking action to 'know' staff; know their interests, abilities and motivations
- employing active communication, particularly listening to staff
- conducting 'honest' conversations
- being able to 'attract people into new tasks'
- fostering membership in appropriate networks and encouraging knowledge sharing within these networks
- showing empathy and understanding of the work of others
- demonstrating technical expertise and tacit knowledge of the way workers operate systems and interpret and work with government processes and policies
- applying their own experience to manage the workplace context and anticipate issues likely to arise
- leading teams and practice communities which often incorporate a wider membership than just immediate work teams.

4.2.3 Supporting co-worker collaboration to sustain work and learning

Learning from co-workers is encouraged by both College Operations Managers and Institute Staff Development Managers. The sharing of skills and experiences between workers is viewed by managers as a valuable and useful way for workers to learn on-the-job. Managers also see workers, and their co-workers, as a group with whom they can share the role of distributing information and for transferring knowledges gained from their own experience. To an extent, Operations Managers are sharing some responsibility for building worker skills but they know they cannot, alone, achieve the type and scale of learning required in the current environment of continual change, fewer resources and increasing demands for services. For these reasons the formation of work practice communities is also strongly encouraged.

The organisation has a vested interest in distributing learning roles, fostering the formation of practice communities and positive co-worker relations because they offer an opportunity for the organisation to save training time and costs and to build currency, relevance and efficiencies into everyday practice. The Operations Manager at Timbers College, Belinda has put in place a strategy she feels will support team members to expand their ideas about work by creating opportunities for workers to meet with, observe and learn from colleagues working in other colleges:

> *'…at times I've asked the supervisors to go out to other colleges and come back and write a bit of a plan about what they see as a process improvement or quality improvement at the college. So it's getting them exposed to different ways…. An awful lot of staff here, have never worked anywhere else and they have been here some of them 20 or 30 years and a lot of them believe there is only one way of doing it and so it's just what's been at Timbers for the last 30 years. And so it's really about trying to get them together with other colleges and other Institutes even to say 'well hang on, there might be a different way of doing something'.* Belinda

Similarly, as the Operations Manager at Oakman City College, Chris, recognises, social working and learning relationships work optimally when members form groups, when and as they need, to address a particular issue. Chris however, notes that in facilitating social connections and practice communities among his team it is important that those involved form connections with each other in response to their own interests and motivations, rather than being forced to form such groups:

> *'…there's value in creating an environment where people see each other in a different way and find interests they have in common, but I don't think it* (practice communities) *could be imposed'.* Chris

In Chris's approach to facilitating social networks he works closely with groups to build his own understanding of the aims and objectives of work communities. He then provides guidance as required to allow communities to evolve and develop in constructive ways. Chris's perspective on the formation of collaborative groups is reflective of key principles of a situated learning model (Lave & Wenger 1991). A situated learning model holds that groups or practice communities form when workers have similar interests and motivations to collaborate. The purpose of collaboration among members may be to share experience and meaning, to guide the learning of others or to solve a unique problem. The value of fostering an environment where groups are able to form voluntarily is acknowledged by Chris. But he also notes that there is merit in fostering social connections between workers which do not necessarily form in direct relation to work tasks. It is useful for workers to simply be able to meet with and see colleagues operate in different contexts. To provide such opportunities, Chris has arranged for a refurnishing and renovation of several common areas at his college to create spaces for informal social gatherings and meetings.

At Timbers College, a successful network, much like a 'community of practice', has formed between staff in the Applied Science teaching section. Despite some strong personalities and entrenched ways of working, their shared

interests and collegiate approaches to work created a close and productive relationship. Belinda made particular note of this, remarking that:

> *'Down in Applied Science, the field staff …I could see they work beautifully as a team. Even though they have a Senior Tech Officer, Tech Officers and trades* (staff)*, and apprentices….they will cooperate, they will decide that for two days they will work together as a group to do this and this, and it's reasonable... it works very well'.* Belinda

In this example, the apprentices are implied to be the 'inexperienced novices' and Technical Officers are considered 'old hand experts'. Novices are accepted as legitimate participants in this group and are guided by the more experienced technical and trade staff. Through the experience of participation in the community the apprentices are expected to eventually become 'experts' if they maintain their participation and engagement within the community (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 53). The quality of their learned skills and the knowledges they gain are in the hands of the 'experts' and this is not questioned by the Operations Manager. Such is her trust in the guidance provided by expert old hands.

Efforts to foster a collaborative community of practice among the Bio-medical team at Timbers College, however, present a contrasting picture compared to the Applied Science group. Despite good work performance, strategies to foster cohesion among the Bio-medical team members have largely failed. There is no hint that a collaborative community will form from shared interests among the group nor with others in the wider college community. When asked about the formation of practice communities as a mechanism for supporting collaboration and ongoing informal learning among the Bio-medical class support team, the manager commented that:

> *'No… the staff (are) the most dysfunctional team of people I've ever come across. I have investigations…it's not about performance. Their work performance is ok. It's personalities'.* Belinda

In this example, a group of experts and novices has formed and operates in a more or less functional way, to achieve ongoing provision of services to students. Team and community work performance is satisfactory and the technical work is productive. However, individual personalities have made the formation of a socialised practice community, at best, challenging. This example clearly indicates successful communities of practice do not necessarily need to be underpinned by social cohesion but, rather, it reinforces the idea that commitment to productive practices can outweigh the effects of member personalities in practice communities. As Wenger (1998, p. 75) pointed out, communities of practice do not necessarily assume peaceful co-existence, mutual support or interpersonal allegiance, but rather, arise from engagement in practice. Wenger (1998, p. 77) then extends this to acknowledge that in reality, productive communities are as much about diversity as they are about homogeneity. Regardless of whether or not managers are able to facilitate the formation of communities of practice, their ability to motivate and foster co-worker collaboration and social networks at work provides a strong base for supporting worker learning.

4.2.4 Guiding individual worker learning and knowledge development

Individual learning strategies are an important point of focus for Operations Managers. Each manager deploys similar strategies to develop worker skills including for example, mentoring, coaching and modelling. In addition, managers also deploy strategies which are less visible and generally less well recognised within the organisation as strategies. These include for example, encouraging interest and alertness among workers, encouraging collaboration and developing strategies to reducing fear of failure among workers. Operations Managers in all case locations are all involved in some way in providing direct guidance and scaffolding strategies to assist individual workers to learn for the purpose of building on-the-job capabilities. The value of setting up of a supportive learning environment for both individuals and for groups is described briefly by the Operations Manager, Chris, at Oakman City College. Chris refers

to his role in setting up and modelling a 'learn to learn' environment by encouraging staff to meet, socialise and to develop a better understanding of the work and experience of others. Chris describes his role as a learning facilitator as being a 'bridge builder' to help individuals and teams make transitions from old ways of working to new ways of working. Chris's main concerns are to set up conditions which assist workers to learn how to learn and operate in new and changing contexts:

> *'I think it's the skill of learning itself…it's learning how to learn and learning how to apply the training that you had in a different environment and different age… and how to adapt and extrapolate and build bridges from what they all know into this unknown* (new work environment) *and bring everyone across those bridges together'.* Chris

Chris's bridge building approach helps workers to better apply their skills and knowledges and to understand the way work needs to be done in the current and changing environment. This is also an attempt to assist workers to both integrate into the changing work environment and importantly, to consider more closely how workers understand how and why work is changing and the processes underpinning knowledge development, rather than just focus on knowledge as an output (Lloyd & Somerville 2006).

Contrastingly, but with similar intentions, Lara, the previous Operations Manager at Timbers College deploys some rather directive strategies in facilitating worker learning for the purposes of building experiences from challenges. The manager observes an activity and then offers feedback on performance for a manager who has not yet developed a particular skill. The Operations Manager explains how she sets up this challenge:

> *'…it (*the directed challenge*) then becomes a task that I impose so that's part of the learning ...it's part of what that then gives me, is certainly that person is being pushed into a leadership role in that particular area because that's what their job or at least their title is about even if the person doesn't particularly have those skills..'.*
>
> and

'Yes (it's about) observation and creating a situation where the person has to prove their level of skill and knowledge. From my perspective, me actually being there creates a tension which is valuable and I will sell them on the basis that I am there to support and back up, but what it also does is it gives me an opportunity to give much more formal feedback on how that person dealt with a situation but also on my standards ….'.
Lara

The imposing of a 'learning opportunity', described by Lara, highlights her need to not only facilitate the professional development of a team member, but also to meet organisational performance expectations. This strategy fits broadly within an apprenticeship model of learning, where guidance in stages of learning is for- grounded. The manager in this case, provides the incentive, challenge, direction and feedback. There is however, clearly an expectation that the worker meets a particular standard of performance and this gives an impression that the learning strategy has become a more structured, directed and monitored event, and one where the learning has a particular purpose and must meet the manager's expectation. The manager's approach in this case adds some weight to Contu, Grey and Ortenblad (2003) suggestion that learning at work, particularly learning that is aligned to organisational objectives, can sometimes be a mechanism for perpetuating particular ways of thinking and acting, thereby increasing control and reducing variety in learning which provide rich experiences. Together, these facilitative strategies and skills highlight the usefulness and importance of managers gaining a close working understanding of the skills and motivations of individual staff in order to develop appropriate and useful strategies. Gaps in worker knowledge are also highlighted through this process. Clearly, attempts are made by Operations Managers to prepare workers for impending change and for implementing longer term developmental strategies.

Other forms of guided learning include mentoring, coaching and modelling. These strategies have long traditions as useful and successful mechanisms for developing people in organisations (Johnson & Ridley 2004; Lewis 2000). As the roles of managers become more involved in developing organisational

structures, and people within such structures, managers will increasingly have to become facilitators, empowerers and developers of other people (Lewis 2000, p. 5). Mentoring he suggests, projects characteristics of being flexible, people centered, non-exclusive and of being broad in focus. Lewis sees mentoring as the process which is most responsible for developing skills and experiences in organisations (p.8). These characteristics are foundational to developing what this research project suggests are the 'working knowledges' about 'how things are done' in the context of the workplace, and which workers need to operate effectively in day-to-day work.

In the context of formal or structured learning, mentoring, coaching and guiding are often applied by specialist facilitators, trained mentors or executives. However, in workplaces, these strategies are more often the responsibility of managers and executives. Frequently, the role of coaching and guiding in day-to-day work falls to line managers and supervisors. The TAFE NSW Performance Management and Developmental Scheme raises an expectation that Operations Managers take on such roles and that they also prepare progress reports on staff performance and their development every six months. In State government departments, staff are often moved around work sections to fill short and long term vacancies and to 'step up' to fill positions when staff take leave or employment transfers. Managers are required to provide 'entry' induction and 'exit' feedback interviews each time a staff member moves to another position. Ongoing mentoring and coaching is expected, as is guiding, assisting and leading workers to further their experiences. Overall, the emphasis on direct manager involvement in worker learning is significant and, as this research project argues, is one which appears problematic for line managers. Two of the main problems are that the role is enormously time consuming for managers of large teams and the provision of the required developmental support to workers is itself not well understood or supported by the organisation.

Apart from some introductory training, Operations Managers are all assumed to be adequately equipped to fully and competently implement the required strategies. This assumption provides some recognition to Operations Managers for their broad experience and extensive responsibilities in managing and leading large teams and their ongoing learning. However, such an assumption also suggests line managers are willing and able to take on these roles. This recognition and assumption of skills is not unique to TAFE NSW as an organisation. Lewis (2000) suggests, as do others, that managers are often viewed as 'good natural and effective mentors for direct reports as they have useful knowledge in the mentee's area of work. But as Nyhan (1991, p. 28) and Billett (2003) point out, mentoring can be a time consuming process which is often a less than satisfying process for mentors and one which can absorb valuable resources and constrain managers' abilities to focus on other responsibilities.

While the concepts of mentoring and coaching strategies are familiar to most Operations Managers, the actual process of putting in place either formal or informal structured mentoring relationships and acting as a mentor, according to the requirements of the department's developmental scheme, are not yet widely practiced by Operations Managers. One reason for this is that managers find difficulty in forming and documenting structured plans. Another reason is that Operations Managers are now tasked with mentoring all of their team members, regardless of worker's level of interest in learning at work. Yet another difficulty for Operations Managers lies in the increasing number of casual staff in Operations teams in colleges. Casual staff are not generally expected to participate in the department's developmental scheme, but many are long term employees and also need to be encouraged to learn new skills to keep up with workplace changes. Casual staff need to also be included in performance development processes but managers find it difficult to develop strategies to appropriately mentor the large numbers of permanent and long term temporary staff who are required to be involved. How to manage the ongoing context based learning needs of casual staff presents Operations managers with an additional challenge.

As a consequence of the conditions and difficulties, Operations Managers have largely been unable to adequately address the requirements of the Performance Management and Development Scheme. Belinda remarks that her day-to-day operational commitments are extensive and the time available to her to interview and plan developmental learning strategies with her team is extremely limited. The challenges of the role were discussed by each Operations Manager and summed up by Belinda:

> '... when I look at all our support staff, the ever increasing changes in staff   and everything, there are so many things that come out and I just look at it for this college and think 'I can't do it...it's a nightmare'... and I guess in a way, I don't know if I've got a bit of a maverick reputation now, but there are some things that I've just said, I'm not doing it'. Belinda

As Belinda has noted, her approaches in mentoring and coaching, for the large part, lacks any real plan. At best, her facilitative learning approach is reactive to current and pressing needs. These scenarios can perpetuate the status quo leaving little opportunity for furthering worker skills development. Belinda explains what she and her senior team leader do:

> '...(we) do ad hoc mentoring, guiding and all that but it is ad hoc. But you know I can't say that we have our own strategies and plans but again with the size of the staff and the fact that so many of them are casual and some of them only come in at night or some only do, say, two shifts a week …how do you engage those people'. Belinda

More formal and structured mentoring and coaching processes, as is expected to be applied as part of this endorsed scheme, will be difficult, if not impossible for Belinda to implement and manage effectively for some team members. Belinda indicated however, that overall, she will do her best to assist team members to learn on-the-job, but some informal and *ad hoc* mentoring and coaching is probably all that she will be likely to achieve with most of her team. The time constraints and demands on all staff, to keep up with changing policies and processes, suggests there is little time in the course of day-to-day work for staff to adequately reflect on their work. Managers clearly try hard to extend

worker learning experiences but there are few, if any, attempts to follow up on these experiences with team members.

Heather, the Operations Manager at Blue Bay College, like Belinda, experiences significant difficulty in adequately engaging some older staff, and some staff who have limited interest in new ways of working and navigating change. To assist older workers, Heather adopts a mentoring strategy which largely resembles a one-on-one training session where she guides and monitors staff to navigate new online compliance related training sessions. Heather comments that:

> 'You know….it's online now. So unless I stay with them….and I was really busy…and there was only two completed it ….which I found very frustrating, you know…..unless you stay with them… you know you've really got to stay with them and continue the mentoring'. Heather

Heather finds online training has to be backed up with constant monitoring and mentoring. Online learning programs are not, in themselves, necessarily sufficient modes of learning for some staff. Some workers, particularly older workers, prefer face-to-face tuition where learning material is given meaning and context by another person. While Heather indicates that the type of close mentoring and guiding she provides is necessary, she also admits that the process of providing continual assistance to some older staff takes large amounts of her time and is, therefore, frustrating and inefficient for both herself and for the organisation.

Additionally, a concern for Operations Managers is that while they actively plan and implement a range of other strategies to facilitate worker learning, they see very little modelling of guided learning, mentoring, coaching or interest in worker development, nor in their own development, from their own managers. Chris, the Operations Manager at Oakman City College and Mark, at Mid-State College both feel they have a good idea of what it means to mentor and coach,

but they receive almost no face-to-face contact, let alone any guidance, from their own line managers. Chris notes the deficiency:

> '...part of it is that I don't get any mentoring either ...so that isn't modelled from further up the tree'. Chris

Chris's and Mark's comments highlight two important issues. One issue is that the organisation, as a whole, develops few strategies to support its managers to develop their skill in facilitating informal learning for others. The other is that the organisation has set goals to develop worker capabilities but does little to model or demonstrate that this has any real priority in day-to-day operations.

4.2.5 Drawing together the main points about how managers facilitate worker learning and navigate challenges

In interviews, all of the Operations Managers indicated they deploy a range of strategies to facilitate work related learning for individuals and for groups. The types of strategies deployed centre around aims to improve social collaboration. As noted in the literature review, Coetzer (2006) and Li et al (2009) contend that with the increasing devolution of learning from central human resource and staff development units to line managers, an important way forward will be to foster support from among co-workers to nurture the development of essential skills, expertise and knowledges. Operations Managers confirmed that much of on-the-job learning is achieved though informal interactions between co-workers. For this reason, co-workers are becoming increasingly valuable sources of information and local knowledges in contemporary workplaces. Their skills and dispositions for sharing their skills and knowledge will similarly become important resources worthy of further development in the future. The direct involvement of managers in facilitating worker learning challenges, however, the view of Hughes (2004, p. 285) who suggests line managers can actively shape the learning of others rather than having direct involvement in the learning process.

Many of the strategies deployed by Operations Managers are consistent with the ways that Beckett (1999) proposes managers can support 'organic learning' in workplaces. As noted elsewhere, managers can create organic learning experiences when they support peer collaboration, learning conducive conditions and clearly articulate how learning links to organisational goals. Importantly, their strategies are proactive and developmental in nature, oriented to building both worker skills and work related knowledges.

However, in several individual case locations, there is an overall expectation that co-workers will automatically become 'office experts', and will competently and unquestioningly share their skills with others. That workers will equitably and appropriately guide co-workers as required, is largely taken for granted by both Operations Managers and Staff Development Managers. This is a significant assumption and a process which Operations Managers greatly rely on to maintain day-to-day productivity. They know they need to foster conditions which support co-worker collaboration to ensure productive and efficient practices. They cannot achieve this alone.

Operations Managers direct significant effort into nurturing and observing behaviours among workers in order to understand worker learning needs and help workers navigate the changing work environment. Operations Managers in all cases see the organisation's capability development strategies as critical to business sustainability, but the lack of guidance from senior managers is a substantial disappointment and incongruent with the goals of the organisation. Recent human resource literature suggests that competitive advantage in the future will depend significantly on how managers are able to develop and mobilise worker's collective and continuous work based learning, and develop their competencies in bringing workers' skills together to achieve high performance (Bratton et al. 2004, p. 32). Operations Managers are clearly doing this but their effort is not sufficiently recognised by senior managers as an important element of their work. While the lack of support from senior managers has not prevented Operations Managers from pursuing informal learning

opportunities for workers, they do attribute some of their difficulties to the overall lack of interest from senior managers.

On the whole, all the Operations Managers actively seek to create and maintain conditions where workers can 'find each other' and, from time to time, form collaborative social connections as ways to learn with and from each other. Co-worker collaboration is important for supporting ongoing worker learning. However, it is also noted that Hughes (2004, p. 285) takes a different view suggesting that while managers are often active in motivating and shaping work, workers are more likely to seek advice and support from their peers and others, than from managers.

Operations Managers see their roles and responsibilities as including the deployment of strategies to foster collaboration among group members, to encourage the sharing of knowledges, insights and 'ways of doing things'. They see the distribution of skill development tasks to others as ways to facilitate both the provision and receipt of learning opportunities. Examples of Operations Managers actively fostering communities of practice, without imposing participation on workers, were found among strategies deployed by Chris at Oakman City College and Belinda at Timbers College where staff are encouraged to meet, socialise and develop better understandings of the work of others. These actions parallel Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998; 2002) underpinning principle of communities of practice which proposes that learning can be nurtured by forming common interests, sharing meanings and understanding different levels of engagement. As Collin and Valleala (2005) suggest, in a recent study of youth workers, social networks are the most important source of support and new knowledge in the workplace. In addition, a sense of community within the workplace is an important influence on work performance and learning. Similarly, the value of co-workers as a learning resource, raised by Macneil (2001) is clearly borne out in Operations Managers' strategies to foster collaborative learning and sharing between co-workers. Moreover, a high level of reliance is placed on co-workers to share the heavy

load of ensuring ongoing productive practices among teams by helping to facilitate on-the-job learning in the current environment of continual change.

There is no doubt that the pace of change in management practices, systems and procedures in contemporary work settings, has increased the need for more immediate, and collaborative sharing of skills and knowledge between co-workers (Billett 2003; Macneil 2001, 2003; Smith 2006; Tennant 2000). The findings from the current research project show that managers, on the whole, are highly aware of the need to, and do put in place strategies to identify individual worker skills, behaviours and learning needs and to continuously understand worker motivations, interests, strengths and weaknesses. This aligns well with Ellinger and Cseh (2007) who suggest that demonstrating and modelling interest in worker learning is an important first step in supporting and enhancing worker learning.

Some of the informal work related learning literature has, however, raised concerns that managers' styles of facilitation (Lizzio, Stokes & Wilson 2005), and concepts of 'community at work' (Contu, Grey & Ortenblad 2003) can operate to restrict rather than enhance equitable access to learning opportunities for workers. In this research project, there is little to suggest that managers selectively exclude workers from access to meaningful developmental opportunities. Rather, all of the cases clearly indicate that Operations Managers actively encourage participation in learning related activities and actively seek to create useful and appropriate learning related opportunities. Some Operations Managers are clearly directive and instructional in how they facilitate learning and some take a more moderate line by guiding and suggesting participation in learning related activities. Some approaches are oriented towards 'getting the job done on time' and others apply a more strategic approach where they facilitate the establishment of, for example, relationships with local businesses to create future work related opportunities. Some managers apply a mix of approaches depending upon what it is that they need to achieve. However, the intention of all managers in this research project

is, clearly, to provide opportunities for workers to expand their work related skills and knowledges.

4.3 Theme 3: How Operations Managers manage the context of work to optimise learning

In interviews Operations Managers indicated a number of work related issues, arising from the context of the workplace, which act to influence the way in which they plan and facilitate work related learning. Operations Managers expend significant effort in managing the current context of the workplace and the challenges arising from these expectations. As noted in the *Introduction*, Operations Managers become involved in work related learning to:

- address changes created by organisational strategies to reduce costs, to restructure, realign and maintain cohesion among teams as work continually changes
- contribute to organisational strategies to increase commercial revenue
- meet their obligations to 'develop staff'
- ensure continuity and productive practices to support teaching and learning

In the following sections, these and related points are discussed in more detail.

4.3.1 Organisational change as a learning opportunity

Operations Managers in all of the case locations have been required to manage staff through a range of organisational changes in recent years. Key changes affecting staff, are those which stem from cost saving and rationalisation strategies and increases in commercialisation of college business. To respond to these changes managers try to firstly prepare workers for change and then

coordinate the implementation of new ways of working. Operations Managers all view such changes as opportunities to build worker capabilities, and to bring teams together to work in closer physical proximity with each other. Managers see change as an opportunity to encourage social cohesion among members and to enable teams to work in more collaborative ways. The following example outlines one manager's attempt to address the organisation's new strategies, by taking a work related learning approach.

At Timbers College, for example, a recently planned college staff restructure has prompted the current Operations Manager, Belinda, to initiate a 'job reorganisation' in one of her college class support sections. Besides managing a large science training facility, the college also manages a unique commercial training laboratory business. The underlying purpose of the restructure was to prepare a large group of teaching support staff and other workers to increase their chance of re-employment when the staffing restructure was to be introduced, and new jobs advertised.

The staffing restructure, although not finalised at the time of this research project, was anticipated to see a reduction in the number of positions and a reassignment of staff within the section. Many of the staff have low levels of English literacy and a relatively narrow work related skills base. The Operations Manager's aim was to engage workers in new teams and introduce some new ways of working together. The objective was to enable workers to build new skills and to gain a greater appreciation for how their work supports students and the goals of the organisation. The problem for staff, and for the manager, is that many staff have previously indicated they are not confident in applying for new jobs and had little interest in changing the way they currently work. The manager could see there would be a significant risk of disruption to the continuity of work, if staff were not successful in gaining new positions. To reduce this risk, the manager created an opportunity to assist workers to widen their experience by implementing a strategy to reorganise work, roles and supervisory arrangements. Belinda was cognisant of the potential disruption for

some workers, but pressed on, in the belief that more good would come from the process than otherwise. Belinda was willing to take the risk. The initiative was endorsed by senior executives. A series of team job rotations and new rosters were put in place with new team leader responsibilities. Staff were consulted and advised, and then assigned to new roles in the development of the realignment.

After a short period of implementation, the Operations Manager noted a small number of staff were benefitting from the change. However, a larger number of staff failed to engage with the process in the intended way. These staff ceased participating effectively and expressed a need to be released from their new roles and responsibilities. Belinda evaluated the overall process and judged the project unsatisfactory. Belinda subsequently advised the college, she would abandon the initiative and reinstate the previous staffing arrangements. The overarching problem was that staff did not want to be disrupted from their entrenched routines and were not interested in gaining new experiences, even to improve their chances of re-employment. Belinda's disappointment with the informal learning opportunity, is evident in the following comment:

> '*I had to take it apart… it was an absolute dismal failure…because of the nature of the people. You have to understand that the majority of these people are women in their 40s, 50s and 60s of different ethnic mix, low self-esteem, low education and the team leaders became ineffective, or they become tyrants'.* Belinda

In this example, strategies to develop worker learning are clearly supported by a number of motivations and plans. Problems arise when assumptions are made about what constitutes work related learning and who benefits. However, it is easy to see that understanding, implementing and managing learning at work can be inherently complex and multifaceted, requiring intricate processes of planning, clarifying and negotiating with those involved (Billett 2004; Fenwick 2006a; Wenger 1998).

The informal learning related initiative implemented by Belinda did not entirely meet either the Operations Manager's, or the worker's, expectations. However, even though the initiative was not successful it did enable workers to see part of a new process to support worker learning put into action. The Operations Manager considers this to be a potential learning experience for those involved, and for the organisation as a whole. Also, in this example, strategies to develop worker learning are clearly supported by a number of motivations and plans. Problems arise, however, when assumptions are made about what constitutes work related learning and who benefits. It is easy to see that understanding, implementing and managing learning at work can be inherently complex and multifaceted, requiring intricate processes of planning, clarifying and negotiating with those involved for the process to be successful and useful (Billett 2004; Fenwick 2006a; Wenger 1998). Well intentioned approaches can be rendered untenable and fragile by participants whose interests do not align with those of the initiator. In Belinda's staff realignment initiative, worker fear of change in roles, and an overtly authoritarian section leadership style, created instability among team members.

Work related learning opportunities, in this case, have clearly not been attractive or engaging for all involved nor have they been entirely useful in managing significant changes to the roles and responsibilities of workers. To some extent this disrupts the view in some management and work related learning literature that implementing job rotations is an effective and uncomplicated management practice which results in on-the-job worker learning.

Conflicting beliefs and values, and a rejection of a new level of empowerment afforded through reallocation of work, are also evident in the outcome of Belinda's strategy. Cultural norms of the Biomedical Science Operations team, and of their places of work in commercial laboratories, were challenged by the reorganisation of teams and work. While the intended individual and group learning did not eventuate in this case, the organisation, through the Operations

Manager, did learn from the experience about the social and cultural positions of workers and the collective power they can hold. The experience for managers and workers was significant; one which will not be easily forgotten. The process has now been reviewed and noted by the organisation and a similar approach is unlikely to be repeated in the same form, in the near future. These types of difficulties in managing informal learning strategies should not be underestimated by managers.

Another way Operations Managers maintain cohesive practices in an environment of continual change, is to change physical workspaces to establish a more effective team or community environment. For example, Chris, the Operations Managers at Oakman City College, observed that parts of teams working in separate physical locations could work more effectively as a team, if they could more easily interact with each other through their day-to-day work. Chris was able to improve the amount of social networking activity among team members by relocating teams into one large work area. This way, workers are now able to see and hear how work proceeds at different stages. Chris has noted a significant improvement in his own understanding, and that of his team, of day-to-day processes. He discusses this as a strategy to facilitate a type of community of practice environment, and one which has fostered and improved worker skills and knowledge development. Chris's intention was not to save costs but to improve accessibility of supervisors, his contact with team members and to model good practices. Chris describes what he did:

> '...even the physical changes I have made here... everyone was sitting in ranks back to where the next wall is, which meant that the supervisor was able to sit back here and have very little interaction with the front, and sort of send people up, and these people always felt they were being interrupted by someone at the counter. Now they are all in a sense equal by all sitting at the counter and that's meaning the role of the supervisor is being shared more with the other people; and they are all 'supervisors', taking on more direct interaction with the students'.

> 'I used to be up in a suite of rooms upstairs here. I had five rooms, all mine. I have given them away and come down here, partly for my own learning to understand what it is this particular office faces, because now

I have got them right at my door, partly so they can see what it is (I) their college manager and his assistant do, ...instead of being this mysterious group up in the clouds'. Chris

The types of changes introduced by both Belinda and Chris, while not always entirely successful, indicate that they are both able to influence and lead teams to work differently. They take on a largely functional role in designing and implementing changes to day-to-day activities to create and expand opportunities for worker learning. This 'functional' approach differs from that of the overall role of the Operations Manager at Blue Bay College who, as noted previously, takes a more compliance oriented, 'operational' approach to worker learning. Evidence, from each of the case locations, suggests that the actual invitational qualities (Billett 2002) of the workplace need to be continually reassessed in order for managers to recognise the workplace conditions that will attract and support learning for both individuals and groups in work settings.

4.3.2 Addressing new strategic business goals

Strategic planning objectives characterise the facilitative learning approaches taken by two Operations Managers in senior positions. One of the overarching strategic objectives put in place by Chris, the Operations Manager at Oakman City College is to build up the presence of the college in the local business community and use this as an opportunity for his team members to become more engaged with the way the college interacts with local businesses. Similarly, a key strategy for Mark, the Operations Manager at Mid-State College is to communicate clear links between the college's strategic vision and the capability development activities he puts in place for staff. Both Chris and Mark see significant value in communicating how the work of operations teams fits within the broader brief of the college.

To support his idea to expand worker capabilities, Chris has negotiated a position for himself on the local council business and economic community group so that he can more effectively represent and promote the interests of the college with local businesses. Chris sees his position on the group as an avenue for promoting college training services, and as a way to access opportunities for college non-teaching staff to make new connections with businesses. Chris also sees these new relationships as a way to build professional partnerships which could then support non-teaching staff to become more involved in external client related activities and expand their professional knowledge and experience. This is a significant change from previous college practices where only a relatively small number of educational managers would have any contact with local business and industry clients.

Chris is confident that, in the longer term, college operations workers would benefit from improving their business and industry skills currency. Chris also sees that these new experiences would help staff to understand how they can better support both TAFE teachers and businesses who access college training facilities. He anticipates that, in light of competition from other training organisations, this strategy will contribute to developing staff capabilities to better support teaching and learning and, further, improve competitive advantage for the college by increasing understanding what the business community needs from the college. Ruth, the senior Staff Development Manager supporting Blue Bay College shares this concern for the future of the organisation and recognises that college staff need to work in ways which are compliant with regulations for training organisations; in this case, to be compliant as an Australian Registered Training Organisation (RTO):

> *'So we are trying to promote an understanding of the business and how important the AQTF* (Australian Quality Training Framework) *is in terms of our business about being an RTO. So if we don't have that – we don't have a business. So it's just as important for support staff as well as teaching staff that this underpins our business'.* Ruth

Taking a different developmental approach, Mark develops staff learning plans each year for his teams. The process of developing the plan helps him to identify the learning needs of both groups and individuals. Overall, the objective is to assist workers, for example, to identify their own learning needs, to build their skills and confidence to operate more efficiently in a changing environment. At the time of conducting interviews for this research project, a key aim was to also raise awareness of issues concerning cultural diversity among both staff and students at the college. Like Belinda, Lara and Mark, Chris's, approach to worker learning is to anticipate how he can expand not only worker skills but also their working knowledge about the environment in which they operate both now and in the future. Chris explains:

> *'I try to expose them (team members) to the concept of not only supporting the college teaching effort but the community effort as well and what it is that the community needs'.* Chris

The example demonstrates that Chris is using his communication and planning skills, together with his ongoing interest and commitment to facilitating worker learning, to identify a significant learning opportunity. In addition to this, Chris has also identified a new, and externally focused, view for his team which he anticipates will contribute to seeing Oakman City College become further integrated into the local business community. This is an important consideration for public service workers, who often continue employment with one, or a small range of government agencies for long periods of time during careers of ten, twenty and thirty years. These career public service workers are rarely afforded opportunities to see how non-government agencies operate. Also, Chris knows he needs to embed these new community and business oriented skills and knowledges in day-to-day practice to achieve ongoing continuity of learning and change. In doing this he anticipates he and his team will make a contribution to redefining the organisation's documented work related learning practices, and, as well, change actual practices.

In a similarly strategic approach, Mark's focus on developing learning plans for staff, and linking these plans to the college Vision statement, is designed to improve the way workers see how their work contributes to the college goals and targets. It is also backed up by an observation that he needs to prepare workers for working with impending change, to raise awareness of changing customer needs and organisational expectations, and, to work in more flexible ways in the future. Mark notes that he facilitates informal learning for workers by flagging learning requirements to address particular needs, for example:

> '... *where we have identified some shifts that are going to occur in a particular area of our operations, then we will include those in our staff training plan. Particularly when I've got new areas…we put in place a new services model so we identified a range of training that was needed not only for legislative requirements for licensing, but also for changing the whole scope of rosters and the way we operate in a more customer focused fashion. I look at it as a cascading sort of thing so a vision for a big picture of the place, looking at plans for areas, and plans for our class support staff. We look to include any other plans that might be relevant to operations staff, or even to just raise awareness of the bigger picture items other than just their normal work. That's where the vision comes in as well. How their work relates in a broader way…to say what's happening in a broader world that impacts on TAFE'.* Mark

Both Chris and Mark see that their roles in bringing about significant change are closely linked to how well they can facilitate new learning for workers; that is, how they can identify worker learning needs to participate effectively in the new work environment. As Marsick and Watkins (1999) suggest, a key action imperative in supporting worker learning is to make strong connections between the organisation and its environment. But how and in what ways connections are made is dependent upon the intentions and dispositions of managers and other decision makers. As Contu and Willmott (2003) and Solomon (1999) have suggested organisational influences can also determine and narrow opportunities for learning. However, in this current study, Operations Managers have clearly made it their aim to broaden the experiences of workers and to raise awareness of how their work contributes to organisational goals.

Another form of organisational change is the recent escalation of commercial business activities and revenue targets for colleges. An ongoing personal commitment to managing organisational change, often underpins managers' actions to develop strategies to facilitate ongoing worker learning. Until recently, these targets had been focal points for a relatively small number of business consultants. Now, commercial business targets are an important consideration for all staff. There is a corresponding increase in the expectation that non-teaching managers now contribute to building new business relationships alongside college business consultants and senior teachers. Part of the process is for Operations Managers to build these new business skills into everyday on-the-job operational work with staff.

The cases demonstrate that Operations Managers are highly aware of the need to be competent and active in deploying strategies which will assist workers to navigate and work with competing organisational priorities. Organisational support for managers in this new role has, however, been limited. This is noted by not only Operations Managers but, importantly, also by Institute Staff Development Managers. The Staff Development Managers Catherine, supporting Mid-State College, and Rachel, supporting Oakman City College, both noted that the escalating need for commercial revenue building strategies and new management systems is changing Operations Managers' roles. Catherine's team recognises this and has commenced introducing programs to support all staff to build awareness of the changing role of the organisation:

> *'The work of TAFE is changing and non-teaching managers have different roles now than they did before. There's more focus on business development and systems changes....we are developing programs to build awareness of the organisation as a business'.* Catherine

This is an important step in the organisation's recognition that the roles of non-teaching managers, including Operations Managers is changing. It suggests that, at least within the college notes, that there is an acknowledgement of the need to support non-teaching managers to build their awareness of commercial business strategies. This is not the same as directly supporting managers to

improve their facilitative learning strategies. But it does suggest some acknowledgement of the need to better support non-teaching managers in how they understand the current context of work and actively contribute to the strategic goals of the organisation.

4.3.3 Taking account of conditions which aid and constrain managers in facilitating worker learning

Staff Development units in TAFE NSW Institutes are vested with responsibility to manage the offering of training programs to contribute to supporting some general, and some specific, teaching and non-teaching staff development needs in colleges. Many Staff Development learning strategies are designed and delivered to address compliance, licensing, or organisational quality assurance and registration requirements. Programs are generally delivered as formal courses in classrooms, workshops, by video conference, or other specialist work settings. While colleges propose staff development training needs for all staff at the beginning of each year, the Staff Development Manager usually decides how funds will be allocated for staff training. Teacher training, and other compliance related training are afforded the highest priority for funding. Two programs which are, however, offered for managers are mentoring and coaching but generally only about twenty paired places are offered within an Institute each year. Every Institute also offers a set of structured leadership forums of two or three hours for managers and these take place approximately four times per year.

All staff are entitled to be provided with professional guidance from their line managers about their performance and professional development needs. Such guidance is to be provided at least twice each year and is intended to guide and support managers to develop their day-to-day management of broad portfolios. Other types of support which can usually be accessed by Operations Managers to assist them in the day-to-day management of portfolios include:

- financial support to enrol in TAFE NSW qualifications where they are directly related to management of a portfolio. Funding is very limited and access is competitive.
- recognition of existing skills and experiences as they align to TAFE NSW qualifications
- individual work and learning planning with line managers
- participation in some organisationally arranged mentoring and coaching
- informal ad hoc mentoring provided by trusted senior manager colleagues
- participation in organisationally arranged leadership forums.

In addition to training programs, Operations Managers in most employment classifications are provided with a number of employment related conditions such as entitlements to time-in-lieu or in some cases, paid study leave to further their formal training, or professional development capabilities. Some 'return to industry' opportunities could also be sought by application but this option is rarely accessed by Operations Managers.

Operations Managers, in most cases, are also aided in their facilitation of informal work related learning by the interest and engagement of worker learners and their agreement to participate as both learners and co-worker facilitators. Without this agreement from workers much of the heavy load of deploying ongoing learning strategies for workers would remain solely with Operations Manager. A key aiding factor in facilitating worker learning is the manager's ability to recognise the skills of others and to engender and foster collaboration among co-workers to effectively distribute the role of facilitating worker learning to others. In the current environment of continual change, this is an important strategy and skill. This is apparent in the following comment made by Ruth the Senior Staff Development Manager supporting Blue Bay College:

' *...informal learning and the effort that goes with informal learning is not necessarily recognised....one strategy will be to look at identifying experts within the organisation to act as contacts and mentors. The staff Development Unit could identify mentors for others to contact...champions and experts and to develop resource, and who is the expert'.* Ruth

Apart from the limited access to mentoring and coaching programs, to learn to become better mentors and coaches and also to be mentored and coached, there are few other programs or activities which generally or specifically assist Operations Managers to develop their facilitative learning skills. There are few, if any, programs which, for example, provide sufficient guidance on managing the workplace context, collaborative learning relationships or in how to plan long term on-the-job staff development strategies. Managers use their own experience and judgments to optimise the use of the workplace in supporting ongoing worker learning.

The Staff Development Managers supporting Mid-State College (Catherine), and Timbers College (Louise), note the insufficient provision of informal learning programs and the unsatisfactory level of attention paid by the organisation to support Operations Managers with professional development opportunities to help them facilitate ongoing learning for others. Catherine volunteered that:

> *'Non- teaching staff have been left out of training for a long time…training was only as good as the line manager's interest in the area.... there's a real disconnect with non-teaching staff and training'.* Catherine

and similarly Louise, the Staff Development Manager supporting Timbers College noted that:

> '...*they* (Operations Managers) *seem to have missed out on a lot of the leadership stuff that has traditionally been done for educational leaders …and not operational leaders'.* Louise

Also, Operations Managers indicated they felt, overall, that their efforts to arrange for staff to attend developmental activities are limited for the following reasons:

- a lack of forward planning by Staff Development units. Staffing arrangements are difficult to change when advice about programs is provided at short notice.
- organisational systems, policies and procedures are often restrictive - too many forms and approvals are required to enable staff to attend learning programs.
- a lack of acknowledgement of staff workloads; staff must catch up their own work after training sessions. Training programs are often seen as an imposition on work time rather than time for productive learning.
- a lack of demonstrated interest in non-teaching staff learning beyond compliance and systems related training.
- a lack of opportunity to practice new skills when acquired. There is an assumption that a one-off training session is sufficient for building skills. Operations Managers recognise that if workers are not able to practice or reinforce what they learn, or cannot see direct relevance to their own work, they tend not to participate in training or on-the-job learning programs. This includes Operations Managers.

In addition, the Operations Manager at Timbers College comments that one of the reasons non-teaching staff tend not to engage in organisationally arranged training and learning programs, is that there are many demands on their time at work and they tend not to want to add to their already high workloads by taking time away from work to attend training which may not necessarily be directly related to their current work. At the same time, Operations Managers also struggle with releasing staff from their daily duties. As Belinda notes:

> *'...there is general difficulty enabling non-teaching staff to attend training courses because they are not replaced. Workplace learning strategies are considered a punishment as it doubles work load* (for those who do attend)*…so staff tend not to participate'.* Belinda

The Staff Development Manager at Mid-State College backs this up with a general observation about college Operations Managers:

> *'We know that non-teaching managers are willing and that managers want to attend programs, it's more about the logistics of getting staff to attend training. Teachers get replaced with other teachers or they get incidental time but not non-teaching staff....a full day program is just too much...'.* Catherine

Despite the difficulties and insufficiencies in organisational focus and attention, Operations Managers direct significant energy and resources into building their own skills and experiences and those of their team members. They indicate that most of the operational, functional and strategic work related learning strategies that they deploy result from their own initiatives, and they use their own time and resources. When asked about how the Institute provided formal or informal learning opportunities to support college Operations Managers and how she prepares for managing the learning of her teams, Heather, the Operations Manager at Blue Bay College indicated both exasperation and nonchalance; she quips:

> *'…I don't know… I think they expect me to absorb it all out of the air'.* Heather

Similarly, when asked about how the organisation supports her in her role to facilitate work related learning, Belinda, at Timbers College responded that the Staff Development team is:

> *'... well, supportive, yes, you know, Staff Development... they'll think about it. But do they support me personally to look at my work load and say well would you like someone to come in to assist you for a while so you can go and do things?. Absolutely not...'.* Belinda

Heather's and Belinda's concern is that the organisation's support and guidance is largely non-existent and that she can do little to change this. Heather feels she is mostly on her own when it comes to planning, implementing and evaluating informal staff learning. The Staff Development Manager, Darcy,

supporting Blue Bay College backs up the Operations Manager's perception, with his comment in which he dismisses the need to assist Operations staff and Operations Managers. Darcy's position is that:

> '*They* (Operations Managers) *don't necessarily need much training; they can learn most things by themselves'*. Darcy

The organisational approach to supporting work related learning in this Institute clearly encourages managers to manage their own learning and skills development. The Staff Development Manager's view is that, in his Institute and colleges, managers can direct their own learning and ask for assistance if required:

> '*….90% of staff skill needs are met by staff 'doing it themselves…, if they want know more about what's happening in the section, they want to know this, they want to know that, they can find out for themselves. They arrange a bit of mentoring themselves, they look up the internet, they can go to the library and get a book out'*. Darcy

When asked what support his unit does provide, Darcy the Staff Development Manager supporting Blue Bay College confidently offered, '*not very much*'. At the outset, these comments suggest that Darcy is applying an off-hand approach to exclude non-teaching staff from accessing training or learning. However, another way to view this comment is that Darcy has a high regard for the skills of non-teaching managers to put in place their own strategies to learn on-the-job. Darcy clearly feels that Operations Managers do not want, or need, to participate in any formal training or learning programs to support them to facilitate informal learning for others in their day-to-day roles.

Similarly, Mark, the Operations Manager at Mid-State College reflected on a similar lack of interest in the overall professional development of non-teaching senior directors and Operations Managers:

> '… *well I've had the benefit of a lot of programs over the years but the last four or five years we haven't had a lot of investment in our Operations Managers as a cohort. … I'm not necessarily worried about*

money or whatever …..but I've got colleagues that may not have any interest in Professional Development and nobody's really talking to them about it …but I do and I do some things, but I'd like to have some structured discussions about what I'd like to do but it's left up to the individual'. Mark

Both Darcy's and Mark's responses further cement the consistent view held by Operations Managers in each of the four cases, that the organisation, through its Institute and college management, lacks overt action to support non-teaching managers to facilitate work related learning for others, and that Operations Managers are more or less 'on their own' in developing skills to facilitate ongoing work related learning.

On a more positive learning note however, Darcy, the Staff Development unit manager supporting Blue Bay College did indicate his unit can assist Operations teams with professional learning if it is required and if funds are available. Similarly, the Staff Development Manager supporting Timbers College, Louise, applies a somewhat pragmatic approach to assess and provide what is actually needed to support worker learning. As the following example indicates there is an undertow of cost saving and minimising formal commitment to non-teaching staff learning, but there is also a sense that work related learning can be just as effective without extensive programming and funding. Positive and collaborative social networking among workers and some self-directed learning can create the type of support managers require. Louise's view is that:

'…a lot of it's about information, and looking for things that are just as effective in learning terms …but better time users….talking to someone else, building up a series of references, …and use the expertise that already exists in your team, and if it's not in your team, then someone else's team'. Louise

Operations Managers in all of the colleges in this study largely follow these principles in their day-to-day facilitation of worker learning, particularly as they are guided by their own expertise and the limitations from within the work

environment. At Timbers College, line managers are encouraged to find cost effective alternatives to formal training, namely utilising and sharing the experiences of others through social networks. In this example, Louise indicates very clearly she is aware of some of the difficulties facing Operations Managers in facilitating informal work related learning and aims to assist, albeit in a reactive way, wherever possible.

> '…*this is why we try to help our staff wherever we can ...we come on board when we know a problem has been recognised'*. Louise

Louise does however, clarify that there needs to be a particular purpose for the assistance, noting that the diversity and size of the job is a huge constraint for managers. Louise also notes a further limitation is the diversity of roles and the number of staff in Operations Managers' teams. They experience difficulties in allocating sufficient time and in developing learning plans for individuals, observing that:

> '… *the scope of the jobs they've got means they can't do jobs they'd like to do at the depth they'd like…when you have 80 people reporting to you it's just not going to happen…not in a lifetime…'*. Louise

Rachel the Staff Development Manager supporting Oakman City College, and Ruth, the Senior Staff Development Manager supporting Blue Bay College provide programs for Operations Managers in setting up and using new technologies, in leadership and in how to apply for advanced standing for formal qualifications. But program availability is dependent on funding and resources available to deliver these programs for non-teaching staff. Often funding for non-teaching staff is substantially limited.

However, Staff Development Managers in all case locations indicated that a large proportion of staff development funding is allocated for new teacher training or to train teachers to meet compliance related obligations. By comparison, only small amounts of funding are allocated for programs or activities which support non-teaching staff. This, and a tradition of self-reliance

in facilitating informal worker learning, are two of the main factors driving the need for managers to develop their own skills for facilitating work related learning.

The Staff Development Manager supporting Timbers College also indicates Operations Managers could be afforded more support in terms of developmental training, but does go on to say that her unit provides programs to support, for example, orientation processes, skills assessment and developing a training plan. Louise indicates that

> '... once we are involved we can assist with developing plans to shadow, how to find the right person to talk to and build up a series of references …who to see about what issue and that sort of stuff. None of that involves being away from the workplace in a training room'.   Louise

Despite their reservations about support from Staff Development Managers in some Institutes, Operations Managers, for the most part, did not indicate that they initiate any regular contact with Staff Development Managers to discuss or negotiate suitable developmental programs for themselves. Clearly, they would like more support, but there is a chance that their well developed sense of independence, coupled with some low level interest from some senior executives, is influencing their hesitance to actively seek support.

However, Belinda reiterates what other Operations Managers have also noted about support from within the organisation. What Managers need most to more effectively facilitate ongoing worker learning, is a more open, and active, support from senior managers to sustain the level of activity required to continuously and effectively facilitate work related learning and ongoing knowledge development. When asked about what she considers to be the most important conditions to be in place to help her to facilitate ongoing work related learning, Louise replies:

'...it comes down from senior management. I think it has to be recognised by the Institute, TAFE NSW and all the way down as a priority. I think it needs funding. And it needs humans... it needs bodies…...'. Belinda

Another recent change in the management of non-teaching staff employed by the Department of Education and Communities has been the introduction of the Performance Development and Management Scheme for Administrative and Support Staff. The Scheme is designed to provide staff with structured feedback on their performance, to recognise contributions to the achievement of corporate goals and to identify opportunities for further skills and knowledge development. Line managers are responsible for implementing and managing this new scheme. Implementation of the Scheme has not, however, been a straight forward process for Operations Managers. Operations Managers in all cases in this study found that management of the scheme had been extremely time consuming and difficult. Several managers noted that both implementation information and training had been difficult to access. The lack of direction coupled with the enormity of the task has undermined the confidence of some managers. There was a feeling that management of the scheme had been more or less left to the discretion of local managers 'to work out what to do' and 'how to do it'. While, managers feel the intentions of the overall performance management strategy appear to be 'useful in principle', the strategy has not yet been afforded sufficient implementation support in some colleges. There remains a strong feeling among Operations Managers that the organisation lacks concrete acknowledgement of the importance and usefulness of their role in managing the developmental aspects of the performance development scheme and in planning and deploying strategies to facilitate ongoing informal worker learning.

The following quote provides some insight into the way one Operations Manager views the organisation's lack of planning and structure to support ongoing work related learning for both managers and for workers. This is reflective of other Operations Managers' perspectives in this research project:

'…organisational strategies are poor. I think we should be best practice considering we are an educational and training organisation. I think it (workplace learning strategies) is a terribly ad hoc approach; we have no clear succession planning. The strategies are not there to support the ongoing learning for staff especially when it comes to non-educational (staff)'. Belinda

And, in Belinda's view, recognition of the time, cost and effort required to effectively facilitate informal work related learning is also missing:

'there's no recognition of the fact that learning requires time and effort'. Belinda

The examples of difficulties experienced by managers suggest that the widely held view that informal learning be integrated seamlessly into day-to-day operational activities is challenging. As noted previously, a key factor which managers feel hinders their progress in facilitating worker learning relates to the way in which the organisation overtly and intentionally supports the concept and practice of facilitating informal worker learning. The cases indicate that managers perceive organisational support to be limited. The issues constraining managers in the context of college operations appear to outweigh those which aid and support managers.

The concerns raised by managers in these examples indicate that the organisation may not yet have adequately embraced guided learning practices for non-teaching staff or that senior managers consider the practice of supporting and fostering informal on-the-job work related learning a low priority. Evidence suggests both are possible. Further, learning that is acquired by workers needs to be documented and shared with others to effectively create a foundation on which further learning can be based. The present research project suggests that there needs to be a mechanism for capturing individual learning so that it can be utilised by others and accounted as contributing to learning of the organisation. Organisational learning relies, primarily, on the learning of individuals and how this learning is transferred to others. A critical part of the process of learning for TAFE NSW as an organisation is for line

managers to aggregate and use the experiences of individuals to be able to manage work and learning practices which are productive and, moreover, ongoing. If the learning of individuals is not applied in day-to-day practices, then organisational learning is unlikely to progress. Key roles for managers are to ensure that worker learning is translated into organisational strategies and that these strategies assist them to facilitate the crossing of 'policy and practice' bridges by workers. The Operations Manager, Chris, at Oakman City College clearly viewed his role as providing the 'bridge' for workers to make relevant links between day-to-day work, learning and organisational goals.

4.3.4 Drawing conclusions about how managers manage the context of work to optimise worker learning

As noted previously, the objectives and goals of the organisation's strategic plans are to develop capability through its human resources. In looking at Institute and college staff development programs, the study shows a range of formal programs are available to Operations Managers to support team members to build their compliance related training needs, but fall short of providing adequate and accessible support for managers to develop on-the-job facilitative learning skills such as mentoring and coaching and guiding. There is little evidence that the organisation provides guidance to Operations Managers to assist them to develop collaborative partnerships or communities of practice. At the same time, Operations Managers do not actively seek to foster 'communities of practice' per se, but rather, they do seek to foster collaboration among workers by changing the physical settings of workspaces to enable easier professional exchanges of information. They encourage the broadening of awareness of the work of others through meetings and other forums, and they encourage social interactions among staff, by creating events and occasions, for work related social gatherings.

This current study has shown that, rather than focus on the novice/ expert transition, it is perhaps better to acknowledge communities of practice as a construct which provides an opportunity for fostering reciprocal knowledge sharing and for supporting relevant work related activities (Hara 2009) and recognition of participation at work (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley 2003). Managers in the current study have indicated that the language of 'group work' and 'team work', are more prevalent than the language of 'communities of practice'. But what they generally aim to foster and develop is a community environment characterised by social networking and learning backed up by collaboration. The community environment and collaborative engagement between co-workers act as mechanisms for sharing knowledge and, importantly, allowing some discussion and some evaluation of work and learning practices.

The cases in this study indicate Operations Managers largely initiate and manage the processes required to plan and implement work related learning strategies. Operations Managers did not indicate that they actively seek to form any substantial community of practice relationships with their Operations Manager colleagues and most did not seek to form collaborative relationships with other senior managers. Their day-to-day work is characterised by self-reliance and self-management of their responsibilities, skills and knowledge development of workers.

The concept of seamless integration of worker learning into day-to-day activities by well supported line managers that is often implied in literature is challenged by the findings of this research project. Holland and De Cieri (2006) and Smith (2006) discuss line managers becoming more accountable for training and learning and this research project indicates an alignment with this trend. Operations Managers are clearly expected to develop staff in some way and as such, they are accountable for some form of worker capability development, if not for formal training. There are however, few organisational procedures which explain how managers should go about developing staff capabilities and few

mechanisms to support this element of their roles. As Head (2010, p. 581) suggests, until organisational capabilities are embedded in core business and the concerns of managers are addressed, the construction of an appropriate guided learning orientation for public organisations will be difficult to achieve. The further integration of work and learning will no doubt make the differentiation of facilitative learning strategies, from other day-to-day management responsibilities, increasingly difficult. Another implication could be that by further fusing work and learning, organisations may continue to insufficiently recognise the important and distinguishing features of the manager's facilitative learning role. There is a risk that the role continues to be under-acknowledged, under-recognised and under-supported in organisations.

The examples discussed indicate some challenges to the organisation's documented strategies to 'develop worker capabilities'. As noted elsewhere, managers are often expected to foster learning for their staff but they rarely receive support or any training for this role (Bierema & Eraut 2004; Macneil 2001). There is a strong sense that non-teaching managers can find their own way, when it comes to learning or seeking support to facilitate ongoing, on-the-job worker learning. There is admission too, among Staff Development Managers, that resources for teaching staff substantially outweigh those afforded to non-teaching staff.

Certainly, Operations Managers in this research project manage large and diverse teams, and they are clearly committed to finding ways to support worker learning. However, the volume of work and competing priorities tend to overshadow their efforts to facilitate worker learning. Operations Managers deploy a range of strategies to facilitate work related learning. But constraints sometimes cause their approaches to appear more reactive and improvised than the planned and pro-active approaches they are often intended to be. Nevertheless, managers learn from both the straight forward 'high ground' and the complex and messy 'low ground' in organisations to develop a culture and practice of learning within the organisation (Argyris & Schon 1996). Analysis of

the cases studied in this research project also support observations made by Fuller and Unwin and colleagues (2007, p. 744) that on-the-job worker learning requires some focus on the context in which learning takes place. Managers in the present study actively seek to 'know' worker's personal experiences, aspirations and capabilities and at the same time, take account of the organisation's business and cultural environment and expectations. The analysis of cases clearly indicate a need for TAFE NSW, as an organisation, to demonstrate that its intention is to develop a more 'expansive' learning culture and similarly demonstrate recognition and support for line managers to effectively facilitate ongoing context-based worker learning.

4.3.5 Concluding observations about the case and other emerging issues

The approaches of Operations Managers to facilitate worker learning, and the approaches of Staff Development Managers, to support managers is summarised in this section. The case study shows that Operations Managers actively facilitate worker learning by taking three main approaches. The actions and intentions of Operations Managers fall into three general facilitative learning approaches which are applied either separately or simultaneously, depending on the type of learning required and outcomes anticipated. Operations Managers deploy strategies to:

1. meet legislative and other compliance requirements. As examples, managers arrange staff development programs and day-to-day systems training with reallocation of tasks as learning opportunities. This a largely *'operational'* approach to worker learning.
2. manage day-to-day operational matters. As examples, managers coordinate day-to-day work with experience building activities, challenges and allocate time and resources to get to know staff personal agencies, interests, and learning needs. This approach is distinguishable by its task management and leadership focus and, as such, takes on a largely *'functional'* perspective.

3. plan and address longer term individual and organisational capability goals, to implement significant changes and use these as learning opportunities. This approach is distinguishable by its longer term planning focus and as such, managers who actively seek to plan and manage worker learning to apply to specific types of corporate goals such as building external business partnerships or to change organisational structures. Managers who plan these types of activities take a *'strategic'* approach.

Each approach encapsulates different manager objectives and purposes for facilitating worker learning. Each approach incorporates a range of strategies which could be deployed to guide informal worker learning. Overall, the holistic case study approach has enabled the surfacing of a range of Operations Managers' experiences in facilitating ongoing, on-the-job, informal, work related learning.

The case study approach has also provided a range of Staff Development Managers' perspectives on supporting managers to become better facilitators of work related learning. The perspectives and opinions of Staff Development Managers are taken as an overall indication of how the organisation views and supports Operations Managers to facilitate ongoing, informal worker learning. The interpretive analysis of data collected from four case sites has enabled both similar and contrasting perspectives and experiences to be illustrated and discussed in light of ideas and trends in recent work related learning literature.

The image of the organisation reflected in this case study, is one of an organisation which recognises the planning and delivery of 'training' through Staff Development programs and organisational strategies which advocate informal development strategies. However, the organisation demonstrates little overt acknowledgement for processes which support and scaffold ongoing informal forms of work related learning and job related knowledge development. A number of policies and procedures, particularly those which govern

employment conditions, shift work and recruitment also act to hinder access to informal learning related strategies. Such restrictions act to reinforce managers' experiences which point to the organisation affording little attention to the ongoing learning of non-teaching staff, and this has an effect of perpetuating the current environment where managers need to 'work it out for themselves'. Given that one of the key goals of the organisation is to 'develop staff capability', the lack of overall focus on how line managers facilitate worker learning is surprising. This issue raises a concern for how the organisation addresses its commitments to staff learning, supporting managers and the wider issue of how managers contribute to the ongoing learning of the organisation.

Operations Managers intentionally create workplace conditions which allow and, indeed, encourage workers to share their skills and expertise. They see this as a way to quickly and efficiently fill gaps in knowledge and to ensure productive work continues. They aim to assist workers to operate in ways which are flexible and adaptable to the changing work environment. They demonstrate genuine interest in sharing knowledge and creating opportunities to assist workers to develop new skills and experiences. The context of work and the workplace clearly has a significant influence on how, and in what ways, managers plan and deploy strategies to facilitate work related learning for others.

Some strategies deployed by Operations Managers are planned and carefully considered. Other strategies are deployed and applied in reactive and *ad hoc* ways, particularly when there is a need to address various challenges arising from the changing workplace conditions or to meet other pressing needs such as implementing new organisational procedures. Overall, the analysis of cases clearly shows that, for a range of reasons, Operations Managers actively facilitate worker learning and, thus have established recognisable practices in facilitating worker learning.

Practice communities are sometimes also intentionally fostered by Operations Managers by setting up conditions which encourage and support continuous connections between workers with the intention of encouraging knowledge sharing. This study supports Wenger's (1998, p. 251) and Wenger et al's (2002, p. 13) suggestion that while communities of practice form naturally among practitioners from shared interests, they do need some encouragement and nurturing to establish and to operate. Managers in this study recognise the potential benefits to individuals and the wider organisation when communities of practice are afforded some guidance, particularly in the process of legitimising participation in the community or group. The study finds however, that the manager's role in facilitating ongoing worker learning appears to be more prominent in the formation of practice communities than suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991).

A significant challenge to managers is that they see that their efforts, time and resources expended in facilitating ongoing informal learning opportunities, largely proceed with little recognition or acknowledgment by the organisation. They feel that senior management fail to acknowledge the complexity and volume of work that is required to fulfill the requirements of the part of their role which requires that they 'develop staff'. They are, however, not deterred by lack of acknowledgement, but rather are concerned about the logistics of managing work related learning for large and diverse teams.

All of the Operations Managers in this study indicated that they feel they are making significant contributions to the organisation's ongoing capability development, but the role and outcomes are subjective and difficult to identify, measure, qualify or quantify. Despite the view of the Staff Development Manager at one case location that Operations Managers can look after themselves when it comes to developing their skills in mentoring and coaching, each of the four Institute Staff Development Managers were aware of the need to recognise the roles of Operations Managers in contributing to the organisation's capability goals. The success of educational delivery is

interrelated with, and in some cases dependent upon, the skills and capabilities of non-teaching operational workers. The findings of this current study are reflective of the observations made by Lewis and Gospel (2011) in their study of the contributions made to research and student learning by university technicians in the UK. Their study similarly found technicians feel that academics see the roles of technicians as less significant in the research process than that of academic staff, and this is a cause for the lack of focus and attention on the training of technicians.

The cases included in this research project indicate an overall similarity between the experiences and perspectives of Operations Managers in how they facilitate informal on-the-job work related learning for others. Each of the cases illustrates a range of strategies which managers deploy and the types of skills they apply to facilitate worker learning. The cases all confirm that there is a connection between what the organisation expects managers to do to 'develop staff' and how these expectations are interpreted by Operations Managers. There are few indicators in organisational documents to inform or even suggest how Operations Managers should proceed to facilitate informal worker learning. There is little to indicate how such strategies could be managed, counted or evaluated and consequently also little to indicate what would be required to ensure a high standard for the facilitation of informal learning. The strategies which are deployed are largely based on managers' subjective assessments about what are, or could contribute to, appropriate and useful strategies in the context of their day-to-day work and obligations. The organisation's staff performance and development scheme is one way the provision of learning opportunities could be monitored but, on the whole, the facilitation of informal worker learning is *ad hoc* and unstructured and largely left to managers to develop and deploy what they consider to be appropriate for the context and to address their objectives. As the cases have shown, and as would be reasonably expected, manager approaches and style vary to accommodate different worker and organisational learning needs. A 'one size fits all' approach to facilitating informal on-the-job worker learning would be ineffective and inappropriate and

for these reasons it is difficult to pin down the practice and provide a simple model or guideline for managers.

A range of skills and experiences are however, evidently required to support managers to deploy worker learning strategies. These include:

- ability to balance and manage organisational objectives and goals with the existing capabilities, motivations and expectations of workers.
- ability to 'know staff' and make judgments about worker learning needs
- ability to deploy strategies which support social networking, co-worker collaboration and skills which ensure clear and effective communication

The choice of strategies deployed and the skills applied by manager are influenced by:

- the skills gaps among workers they identify and choose to assist
- the resources, for example, funds, physical space, time, acknowledgment and support available to them and the nature of policies and procedures within which they are obliged to operate.
- the dimension in which they focus their efforts, that is, how they choose to address compliance needs, daily production and service targets and plan and manage longer term and more strategic approaches to support staff learning.

This case study also indicates:

- a general concern among managers for setting up and managing effective socio-culturally supportive learning conditions. But managers are almost always left to identify these conditions and foster such conditions using their existing skills and expertise
- an overall lack of guidance available to Operations Managers in how they could plan and coordinate ongoing work related learning strategies such as how to develop scaffolding and extension learning skills for others

- insufficient acknowledgement in documents and in discourse of the Operations Manager's role, its value in sustaining ongoing staff skills development and in maintaining ongoing on-the-job services to customers
- a shortage of appropriate programs to support ongoing on-the-job worker learning. Limited access to programs suggests some deficiency in understanding of the role at an organisational level.

In this Chapter, findings from the cases have been outlined and discussed under three key themes. The case study strategy has allowed examples of strategies and skills deployed and applied by line managers in facilitating informal work related learning, in the context of a government organisation, to be documented and discussed in some detail.

In Chapter 5 following, a number of implications and observations arising from the analysis of cases for TAFE NSW as an organisation are put forward. The analysis and discussion of cases has enabled the development of a proposal for a framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning. Recommendations for managers and for TAFE NSW conclude Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES FROM THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter synthesises the main outcomes and implications from analysis of empirical data from cases discussed in Chapter 4. Interviews and document reviews highlighted a range of current practices and circumstances which influence College Operations Managers in how they facilitate informal on-the-job worker learning. The case analysis also highlights how the organisation, through its Staff Development Managers, supports Operations Managers to carry out this role. The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the findings and key points of discussion from Chapter 4 to present answers to the research questions which, primarily asks, 'what role does a manager play in facilitating work related learning'. The analysis and discussion bring to light a number of implications for managers and for TAFE NSW. This chapter also proposes a framework for guiding managers to more effectively facilitate worker learning and an ideal model for facilitation of work related learning which could be used by managers and by other organisational decision makers. The chapter concludes with a summary of how the research project contributes to improving understanding of manager practices in facilitating informal on-the-job work related learning.

The chapter is organised in four sections, as follows:

1. Answering the research questions

2. Proposing a framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning

3. Proposing a way forward for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning

4. Recommendations for managers and for TAFE NSW

5.1 Answering the research questions

Answers to the primary and secondary research questions are offered in light of findings and observations from cases, literature and researcher experience.

The primary question '*What is the actual role of the manager as a facilitator of informal work related learning?'* is answered first. This is followed by an answer to the secondary question *'How does the organisation support this role*'? and the two subsidiary questions '*What motivates, aids and constrains managers to facilitate informal work related learning?*' and '*What might need to continue or change for this role to more effectively contribute to both individual worker learning needs and an organisation's worker capability development goals*'?.

1. What is the actual role of the manager as a facilitator of informal work related learning?

The research project clearly indicates Operations Managers are expected to develop the capabilities of workers within their teams and that they are involved in deploying a range of strategies and applying a range of skills to facilitate worker learning. Key components of the role are to create opportunities for, and to encourage, worker participation in on-the-job activities to build and extend work related learning experiences. Their objectives are to ensure workers work productively and efficiently to support teaching and learning in colleges. They manage this by fostering a continuous learning environment and participation which complements worker's existing skills and knowledges.

The actual manager's role is influenced by the organisation's obligations, expectations and need to develop short and longer term worker capabilities to attend to the local business environment. It is shaped by managers' strategies, their skills, commitments to learning, and views about what workers need, and want, in terms of ongoing on-the-job learning. As the cases in this research

project demonstrate, the 'role' primarily exists and operates as an aggregation of a manager's own self-directed facilitative learning practices and commitments to developing worker capabilities and local operational knowledges.

The Operations Manager's role is characterised by dual responsibilities in maximising business productivity and in building worker capabilities to actively contribute to the ongoing learning and development of the organisation. As noted previously in this research project, managers are highly aware of the need to balance their strategies to address both responsibilities. The cases indicate that Operations Managers actively seek to bring together both of these parts of their role to create a facilitative learning practice which supports learning for the benefit of individuals and for the organisation. Operations Managers in this research project have shown a significant interest in, and commitment to, creating opportunities for informal and ongoing worker learning. They are equally committed to improving workers' skills and abilities to contribute to organisational goals and to sustaining the business of the organisation as a whole. They do this by creating opportunities where they can work directly with worker learners and allow them to learn both independently and from others within the various contexts of college operational work areas. Managers foster and capitalise on, but not exploit, productive socio-cultural relationships between workers. Managers indicate they make time to plan and develop strategies which they anticipate will encourage workers to share their ideas and expertise and to solve problems arising from day-to-day work. They support on-the-job learning to encourage workers to continuously develop their skills and knowledges through active participation in new and challenging activities. They create meaningful and useful learning opportunities, mentor, coach and guide workers. These findings align with projections put forward by Billett (2002), Marsick and Watkins (1990, 1999) and others, that worker learning is optimised when workers are empowered, can form collaborative relationships and can participate in authentic practices and are afforded access to experts.

To address worker learning needs, which are not sufficiently addressed by more formal training programs, Operations Managers actively facilitate informal worker learning by using the resources of the social and physical contexts of the workplace. Operations Managers know that social connectivity between workers will be enhanced if physical workspaces are designed and appointed to encourage collaboration between workers. This strategy is largely driven by an observation that collaboration and sharing of expertise among workers is an effective and cost efficient way to ensure workers keep up-to-date with current work-based practices and assist each other to address, and solve, work related problems. It is also recognised as a way to share the heavy load of responsibility for ensuring workers maintain their skills currency and keep up with new processes created by the continually changing procedures, systems and new initiatives that are frequently introduced in colleges. Operations Managers' facilitative learning practices are not focused only on learning for organisational compliance and productivity. There is also an underpinning commitment and interest in the capability development of individual workers and to support them to perform to the expected level for their appointed positions. They also support workers to learn on-the-job to assist then to gain employment advancement within the organisation.

A large part of the Operations Manager's role as a facilitator of work related learning is to articulate and deploy a range of parallel strategies which enable them to address both ongoing and some longer term worker learning needs. The line manager is integral to forming a strong link in the chain of intersecting issues, namely, to contribute to goals and targets, improve productivity and services and develop worker-learner knowledge. The study has shown that a key role for Operations Managers is to create a conceptual link, or bridge, between workers, their day-to-day work and the goals of the organisation. There is a strong sense of need among Operations Managers to do the best they can to support college teachers, and other staff, so as to provide high quality services for students and other customers. At first glance informal learning strategies, and their application for workers, appear reactive to the pressing needs of individuals or groups. Their strategies sometimes also appear to be

impromptu and unstructured because a large part of their work requires responses to unplanned or changing circumstances. But, the research project has also highlighted that some strategies are carefully planned and include broad consultation with staff and other managers prior and during implementation (for example, Timbers College staff reorganisation). Other strategies are developed over long periods of time to gradually build worker involvement and understanding of, for example, how they contribute to new business relationships within the local community (for example, Oakman City College reciprocal business relationship planning and Mid-State College development of staff learning plans).

Some of the outcomes of the research project, however, challenge one of the commonly held views that informal work related learning is largely a self-directed process or a process which occurs when workers share interests in solving similar problems. Informal learning literature tends to treat worker learning as requiring little or no nurturing, planning or structure. In contrast, the research project has shown that the role played by Operations Managers in facilitating work related learning is one which requires expert skills in identifying, planning, organising and monitoring suitable learning related activities for workers. The diverse contexts of college operations work, with staff coordinating a wide range of services across multiple disciplines, and the need to contribute to various organisational targets, suggests that the facilitative learning role of managers often involves substantial structuring. Bridging and balancing strategies also characterise their approaches in developing their facilitative learning strategies. Facilitating learning for working productively is the most prominent goal of managers and this is achieved largely by 'knowing' staff and being able to share the role of facilitating learning with others. At the heart of the process is the fostering of collaborative relationships between workers. It is however, important to note that, as demonstrated by the Bio-medical team at Timbers College, a socially dysfunctional team can also perform their technical work productively.

2. How does the organisation support the role?

As an organisation TAFE NSW provides a range of programs to support all staff to acquire new skills or to complement previous skills. A number of organisationally delivered programs relate to meeting requirements that staff have received training on recent legislation concerning, for example, Child Protection and Work Health and Safety. Other programs offered assist staff to improve their skills in the use of systems and understanding of current initiatives or new policies. Occasionally, programs are funded to support a particular project or special need.

Staff Development training programs concerning managing performance, developing communication skills, and mentoring participation programs are also offered. These constitute the organisation's main mechanisms for supporting the ongoing development of Operations Manager skills in facilitating informal worker learning. A number of employment related conditions in some employment awards, such as study leave and some financial assistance to complete a TAFE NSW course, are also offered. Study leave is not included in the employment award for College Operations Managers who are classified as Institute Managers. This applies to managers in most large metropolitan and regional colleges.

All of the Staff Development Managers interviewed talked about Operations Managers making high value contributions to worker learning. This verbal admission is heartening. However, as noted elsewhere in this research project, this is not translated into actual organisational support in the form of training programs, modelling or concrete acknowledgement by senior executives. As noted in several cases, the approaches to supporting manager learning by Staff Development Managers indicates Operations Managers rely on their own resources to develop their facilitative learning strategies and skills.

3. What motivates, aids and constrains managers in facilitating informal work related learning?

College Operations Managers are largely motivated to assist workers to learn on-the-job by their responsibilities to ensure the work of their teams, and their collective achievements, are productive and efficient. Operations Managers are also motivated by a need to ensure that their teams learn new technical and administrative skills, how to work together, and how to navigate and adapt to the changing work environment. They are particularly motivated by the need to ensure that individuals and teams keep abreast of workplace changes by continually participating in on-the-job knowledge developing activities. This means understanding the reasons for changes, operating new systems and policies, following new procedures and being able to productively challenge processes and contribute to more innovative ways of working, particularly through teams, groups and communities.

Access to organisationally developed programs and forums, such as mentoring, coaching and leadership, motivate and aid the development of Operations Manager's own learning. Some Operations Managers are also aided by teams which are engaged, and active, in forming functional and productive communities of practice and other collaborative working relationships. In some instances, the development of skills to support the facilitation of informal work related learning is also aided by training programs offered to all staff within the organisation, a number of employment related policies which support further study, and the commitment and interest of some senior managers. However, most Operations Managers experience difficulties in taking advantage of these types of supportive mechanisms. Operations Managers are further motivated to build worker capabilities so they can distribute some responsibility for worker learning to other capable team members and to lighten the burden of the enormous task of effectively deploying strategies to suit a wide range of learning needs and styles. Operations Managers are, on-the-whole, self-

motivated, self-directed and largely self-taught in deploying strategies and applying skills to facilitate worker learning.

While Operations Managers appear generally well equipped to take on the facilitative learning role, the high volume of their other day-to-day work requirements, some restrictive policies and procedures, insufficient time and low level motivation and fear of change among some workers all act to constrain their capacity to plan and manage work related learning in the way, and to the extent, they would like. Staff Development Managers also acknowledged that there are fewer programs for non-teaching managers than for some other cohorts of staff, namely, college teachers. When suitable programs are offered, the large volume of work and ongoing urgent commitments often restricts or prevents Operations Managers from participating. A key factor which indirectly constrains managers in reaching their full potential in facilitating worker learning is that, in their experience, some senior managers and decision makers demonstrate little interest or active support for this element of the Operations Manager's role.

Another factor constraining Operations Managers is that their role in facilitating worker learning has limited visibility, or evident identity, within the organisation. This research project has identified key components of the manager's role and managers readily discuss what they do to facilitate worker learning. But the organisation, as a whole, does not overtly recognise the role as a competency or a capability of Operations Managers. It appears from the present study that the role exists largely because the Operations Managers have identified a need to assist staff to develop their on-the-job skills and knowledges and thus deploy a range a strategies to address this need. The present study indicates that the role has evolved to a large extent, more from manager interest in workers and their commitment to fostering productive practices than from organisationally advocated strategies. Further inquiries into this role may reveal more about why the organisation offers the role only minimal attention.

4. What might need to continue or change for this role to more effectively contribute to both individual worker learning needs and an organisation's worker capability development goals?

As noted elsewhere, the involvement of line managers in worker learning, and in developing a culture of mutual support between workers and co-workers in organisations, along with the growing importance of context based knowledge development, is gaining momentum in contemporary thinking about organisational management and learning (Eraut 2007; Smith 2006). There is no sign of this abating. Such moves are increasing the need for managers to further develop their own facilitative learning skills.

To make effective contributions to organisational capability development goals, managers will need to continue to manage the context of work to ensure learning conducive conditions are maintained. Given the need to keep up with changes in the contemporary college workplace, managers will need to foster and actively support the formation of collaborative social work relationships between workers as a way to encourage and promote participatory practices. Managers will need to motivate staff, capitalise on their skills and experience, create appropriate opportunities and support reciprocal learning among team members. Moreover, managers will need to model and nurture workers to willingly train and guide co-workers and others. The sharing of information, knowledge and skills will be of paramount importance in developing future productive practices in environments of continual change and diminishing resources. To support managers to make effective contributions to organisational capability goals, managers' roles in facilitating worker learning need to be better recognised and supported by senior executives and other senior decision makers within the organisation. For this to take effect, informal work related learning needs to be acknowledged as a legitimate and critical resource for ongoing organisational capability development.

The organisation's expectations for manager involvement in capability development and the way in which managers are supported to facilitate worker learning appear, however, to be at odds with each other. To improve the way in which workers' skills are developed, and to increase the effectiveness of the manager's role, there needs to be a closer alignment between the organisation's documented expectations, senior manager support and manager facilitation practices. This research project has enabled current practices and perspectives of managers to be identified, recorded and discussed. At the commencement of the research, the role of the manager as a facilitator of work related learning was proposed as being in need of reconceptualisation, to better understand the complexities of the role. This rethinking was posited as leading a way to better understanding more about what it is that Operations Managers actually do to facilitate worker learning. However, findings from this research project have indicated that the role of an Operations Manager as a facilitator of work related learning has not yet been adequately conceptualised or described by the governing organisation nor by individual Operations Managers, themselves. It is likely too, that workers may struggle to adequately understand such a role and how managers could or should support them as worker learners. This suggests then that what is needed, in the first instance, is not so much a reconceptualisation, but, rather, a 'first time' conceptualization, a naming, description and a deeper understanding of the role, and its challenges, in a contemporary organisation. This would enable key elements of the role and how it is influenced to, at least, be considered in terms of why it is important, what can be done to improve the role and how it contributes to organisational goals.

This research project has now enabled one conceptualization of the role to be put forward. As a starting point, the role can be viewed and considered in terms of acting as a 'connector' and 'developer' of people, a role which sees Operations Managers as:

- active in continuously 'bridging' and connecting work and workers to align their roles with changing organisational systems and processes

- competent in applying strategies to manage learning for a range of purposes and to address different organisational needs which are encapsulated in the various operational, functional and strategic learning approaches deployed by Operations Managers, rather than as a 'one approach will suit all' process
- playing a role in integrating work and learning in ways which enable and balance ongoing development of on-the-job skills and knowledge to support productive work in a changing environment, rather than the reactive 'add on' role which tends to see managers as simply 'arrangers of training'
- skilled in creating opportunities for worker learning
- interested in 'knowing' workers to develop their knowledge of staff abilities, gaps in knowledge, their goals and motivations
- undeterred in openly bringing learning into workspaces and everyday practices, and to allow work and learning to be observed and possibly monitored by others
- creating, despite the challenges, a facilitative on-the-job learning practice

The new way of thinking about the role makes clear the potential influence and valuable contribution Operations Managers can make in supporting teaching and learning and the business objectives of TAFE NSW colleges.

These findings suggest that the organisation needs to:

- reconsider the Operations Manager's role and its connection with strategic capability development goals
- acknowledge and provide better support to the key role of line managers in facilitating ongoing informal work related learning
- reduce barriers to manager facilitation of ongoing informal worker learning
- recognise the integrated nature of work and learning and to take steps to make the facilitative learning role more explicit and recognisable in relation to other management tasks

- strengthen and widen understanding of the role and its challenges among managers, executives and workers

To enable workers to learn more effectively from on-the-job experience, managers need to be able to set up conditions to encourage worker engagement with learning related activities. This will require that managers further extend their planning, communication and negotiation skills with respect to managing worker learning. Important first steps in a manager's strategic communication and modelling processes are to understand the reasons why the facilitation of worker learning is necessary for individuals and for the organisation and to establish and communicate clear links between organisational goals, day-to-day work and the need for ongoing learning to address these goals.

The next most important steps are to develop and maintain a culture of supported collaboration among workers so as to distribute the workload to other capable team members. A key aim is also to clearly show that strategic and ongoing worker learning and knowledge development is valued and rewarded by the organisation (John 2009). As noted in previous sections, the diversity of the role and the large number of team members reporting to Operations Managers highlights the potentially broad involvement and contribution which Operations Managers could make to improving organisational productivity and capability development. Key determinants of how well this will work are the skills, dispositions, willingness and resources available to Operations Managers. The ongoing changes which characterise contemporary college operations work underpin the reasons why Operations Managers in TAFE NSW Colleges develop strategies to facilitate ongoing worker learning. The need to maintain productive practices, in times of rationalisation of funds and the concomitant building of new revenue streams for the organisation, are other reasons why the organisation could reap financial benefits if it more effectively supports managers to facilitate ongoing informal learning for workers.

It is noted, however, that 'learning' and 'knowledge development' are often difficult to identify and quantify. Learning, and making meaning from the process of learning, can often be realised long after a learning activity has taken place Learning conducive conditions of the workplace can provide the foundations for extending staff skills and knowledge beyond their usual job roles and improve the chances of productive work in the future (Evans et al. 2006; Lewis 2000; Winterton 2002). The creating of opportunities for learning, coupled with supportive dispositions of managers, can provide a solid backing for the making of valuable contributions to organisational learning and sustainability. To optimise worker learning, managers need to be able to modify or change the way they deploy strategies and apply facilitative skills to address changing circumstances and changing and aging workers.

A more substantial form of acknowledgement, from the organisation, of the role and responsibilities of managers in facilitating ongoing work related learning would serve to bolster Operations Manager perceptions of how well they facilitate work related learning. Hamlin (cited in Bratton et al. 2004, p. 32) for instance, in observations about contemporary human resource development strategies, recognises the competitive edge managers can bring to an organisation when they are involved in developing staff capabilities. However, he also cautions that on-the-job learning can be seen as a measure for capital accumulation, rather than an opportunity for improving the quality of work and security of workers. But Hamlin acknowledges, as others do, that corporate executives need to create work structures and a culture of continuous learning which is integrated with work to achieve high level economic performance. Noting this advice, TAFE NSW as an organisation could implement changes which enable managers to focus the development of their own skills so that they can align their facilitative learning strategies more closely with organisational capability goals and business plans.

5.2 Proposing a framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning

The cases studied have identified a need for more guidance to be provided for workplace managers in how to facilitate informal work related learning for workers. The following framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning has been developed to partly address the deficiency noted by Operations Managers in TAFE NSW. The framework summarises issues arising from analysis of cases and from reflection on issues emerging from this research project as a whole. This includes reflection on ideas which have been raised in a range contemporary literature in the areas of work related, human resource and organisational learning literature (for example, Billett 2001a; Grugulis 2007; Livingstone & Sawchuck 2004; Sambrook 2004; Watkins & Marsick 1993).

The complexities of the concepts of work, learning and workplace, particularly when they are combined in workplace contexts, are noted in a range of recent literature (Candy & Matthews 1998; Fenwick 2006a; Sambrook 2004). As the cases have identified, various organisational policies, complicated social relationships and competing work priorities, underpin managers' motivations and practices in facilitating on-the-job work related learning. The diverse strategic business goals, the different work related tasks, worker learning dispositions and the challenges created by the current economic environment are enough to make the job of developing a 'one size fits all' work related learning process impractical, if not impossible. The present research project indicates that what is needed is a more practical approach to providing assistance to managers to develop their facilitative learning practice. A useful way to achieve this is to propose a framework for manager facilitation of work related learning with practical examples of reasons, strategies, skills, support and outcomes.

5.2.1 Describing the framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning

The purpose of the proposed framework is to outline key components, with examples, of a facilitative learning practice. Managers could use this to begin, or to build on, how they develop their strategies to facilitate informal on-the-job work related learning. The framework is based on a general policy framework which provides a logical structure for grouping information to assist understanding.

The framework draws together experiences of Operations Managers, in the present research project, who manage non-teaching teams in vocational training colleges. The framework thus reflects these contexts but it is possible, however, that the framework could well be applied in other educational, workplace or business contexts.

The proposed *'Framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning'* sets out, in columns, five key components of a manager facilitated work related learning practice in the context of a contemporary government organisation. The components are drawn from analysis of cases in the present research project and from ideas in recent literature. The components constituting the framework are:

- Component 1: Why managers become involved in facilitating worker learning

- Component 2: Types of strategies managers can deploy

- Component 3: Types of skills managers can apply

- Component 4: Organisational support

- Component 5: Uses and potential outcomes

Figure 3: Framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning

Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4	Component 5
Understanding why managers become involved in facilitating worker learning	**Types of strategies managers can deploy**	**Types of skills managers can apply**	**Organisational support**	**Uses and potential outcomes of informal worker learning facilitation**
Manager responsibility to support teaching, learning and other organisational goals	Establishing and managing workplace and work related conditions conducive to learn efficiently	Planning and managing skills to create appropriate opportunities for worker learning	Build visibility, legitimacy and an identity for the role	Ongoing individual and team capability development
The need to address day-to-day business imperatives and manage change	Arranging job changes, mentoring, coaching and guiding	'Knowing' others	Endorse the facilitative learning competencies of managers	Improved understanding of informal learning processes
Manager commitment to developing worker capabilities to work productively and to meet short and longer term goals	Fostering collaboration with co-workers and other learning partners	Effectively communicating	Senior executives develop a culture of, and model, informal on-the-job learning	Meaningful experiences and current working knowledges
	Identifying and applying appropriate challenges.	Actively collaborating with staff	Senior executives support the development of relevant learning programs for line managers	Ongoing organisational learning and capability development
	Modelling learning and a community environment	Seeking assistance from Staff Development Units to develop informal worker learning programs and other strategies		Sustainable business operations
	Appropriating organisational support	Recognising and acting to address challenges		

5.2.2 Explaining the components of the framework and its aims

1. *Understanding why managers become involved in facilitating worker learning*

   These are typical reasons why managers become involve in facilitating informal worker learning. They include organisational expectations, observations of skills gaps among workers and a need to ensure workers are well prepared to operate in flexible and competent ways in a continually changing work environment to meet customer demands.

2. *Types of strategies managers can deploy*

   These are examples of strategies which managers could deploy to facilitate worker learning for different purposes. They include, for example, identifying appropriate worker learning needs, arranging job changes, mentoring, coaching, guiding and identifying and applying appropriate challenges from which workers could learn, and creating social connections and learning conducive conditions within the work environment. An important strategy for managers is to be able, also, to identify and manage issues which present difficulties and challenges for workers and for the process.

3. *Types of skills managers can apply*

   These are examples of the types of skills managers could apply to facilitate ongoing on-the-job worker learning. These are also loosely grouped in relation to the three different overall approaches (the operational, function and strategic) applied by managers and the strategies managers deploy. The framework proposes that managers need to be skilled in communicating for different purposes, particularly for uncovering and 'knowing' the strengths and weaknesses of team members, creating a productive and developmental working environment and blending different strategies and skills.

4. Organisational support

This component lists some key opportunities for the organisation to improve the ways in which it supports Operations Managers in facilitating informal work related learning. Opportunities lie in the way it acknowledges the role of managers, makes visible, and builds an identity for the role and its contributions to organisational learning. The organisation could also more explicitly endorse the facilitative learning competencies of managers, develop a culture of learning and model good informal on-the-job learning practices. Senior executives could also need to support the development of relevant learning programs for line managers.

5. Uses and potential outcomes

This component of the framework lists some examples of potential outcomes of facilitated worker learning for both individuals and for the organisation. The outcomes are linked to the managers' motivations, strategies and skills. Outcomes are not dependent upon application of all of the components equally. Rather, learning outcomes can be achieved from understanding and applying any combination of components. Importantly, individual and organisational learning is likely to be optimised if managers and the organisation draw insights from each of the components.

The aims of the research project, in developing this framework, are to:

- assist organisations and managers to address organisational capability development goals

- provide examples of how managers can plan and facilitate ongoing informal on-the-job worker learning

- assist managers to develop workers' currency of work related knowledges

- note and promote the types of outcomes which could be expected from a well planned and conducted facilitated on-the-job learning practice acknowledge that a facilitation practice can be strengthened when a number of underpinning principles are in place.

5.2.3 How to use the framework

Managers and organisational decision makers can use the framework as a point of reference to steer the development of strategies for facilitating informal ongoing worker learning. Organisational executives can use the framework to develop informal worker learning and development strategies and to support and justify the use of resources to develop context based informal learning. The framework could act as a substitute, or as a way to complement, formal training. Managers, and other organisational decision makers, can use the framework as a source of ideas for developing strategies and applying skills required to extend and expand workers' skills and knowledges. They can also use the examples of outcomes to seek more effective organisational acknowledgement and further support for the development of their facilitative learning practice. This might include improving the way strategies are documented and implemented by the organisation.

Emphasis on the formation of productive social relationships between workers as a way to support informal learning is a characteristic of many contemporary, informal work related learning models. The framework developed from the present research project also emphasises the importance of collaborative relationships at work to support informal learning. However, this proposed new framework goes further than others by bringing together a number of other practical strategies and examples of the skills that could be applied by managers to facilitate informal worker learning. It notes examples of challenges and types of outcomes which could be expected from a well supported facilitative learning approach. In this sense, the framework acts as a point of reference for managers, organisational planners, for learners, and others who

make decisions about worker capability development in organisations. It provides a source of ideas from which managers, and others, can build their own facilitation practices.

The components, while appearing as discrete lists of ideas in the framework diagram, are, in practice, closely interrelated. The two-way arrows link the components to indicate that each one is related to, but not dependent upon, the others. The intention of the framework diagram is, however, to try to separate and make clear, examples of key practices which are most likely to lead to informal worker learning. The way in which the components are set out is not intended to suggest that a manager's practice requires a linear application of motivations, strategies and skills to eventually achieve an outcome of learning. Rather, each component represents a number of practices which are identified as useful for managers and organisational decision makers to plan and manage the facilitation of ongoing informal work related learning. The model encapsulates valuable components of a situated learning model, namely, consideration of the working and learning context and the formation of social relationships which operate to support and grow opportunities for assisted learning.

Analysis of the cases in the present research project has highlighted the key components of what could now be included in an ideal model of manager facilitation of work related learning. This model is outlined in the next section.

*5.2.4 Introducing an ideal model for manager facilitation of informal work related learning.*

Manager facilitation of work related learning is likely to be optimised when the following key components are in place and, ideally, accord with each other:

- explicit organisational goals

- manager interest and commitment to worker learning

- effective management of the physical and social context of work

- manager competence in planning and deploying a range of strategies suitable for the context

- manager ability to apply a range of skills suitable for the strategies deployed

- demonstrated organisational support

Further, the research project has identified that at the heart of an ideal model for manager facilitation of work related learning is the perception among managers that the organisation supports their facilitative learning strategies and practices. The other key components, and their relationships, are positioned in the following diagram (Figure 4) to indicate worker learning takes place regardless of the level of support and recognition afforded by the organisation. However, managers feel that their facilitative learning practices would be enhanced and that learning would be optimised if the organisation afforded more overt support for the role they play in facilitating ongoing work related learning.

Figure 4: Key components and relationships in an ideal model of manager facilitated work related learning
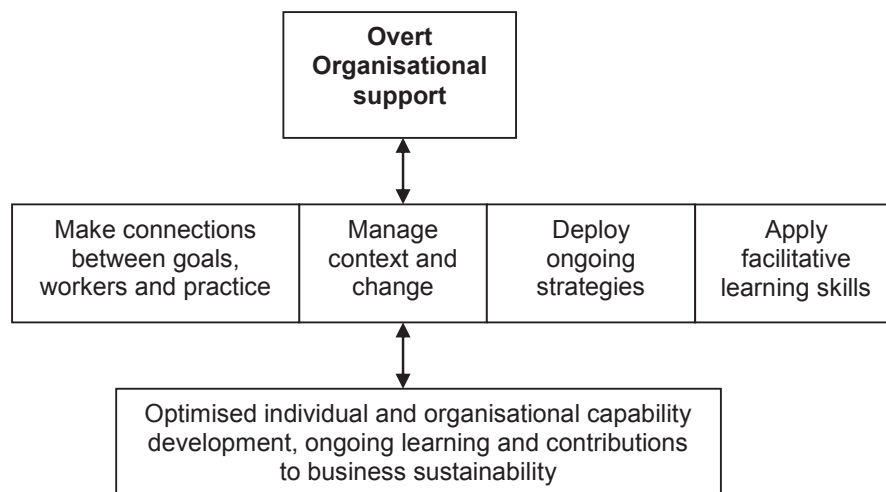
Overt organisational support in the form of acknowledgement and recognition acts to build manager's confidence, their perceptions and their efforts in articulating appropriate connections between goals, workers and practice. Organisational support plays a key role in motivating and assisting managers to develop and deploy strategies and apply appropriate skills to enable workers to effectively combine work and learning. Well supported managers' practices are anticipated to optimise worker learning and ongoing capability development. As the present research identified, Operations Managers carry on facilitating worker learning regardless of the level of organisational support. But as the research also identified, there was a strong perception among Operations Managers that they could do better if the organisation more openly acknowledged their role and the challenges they face in facilitating worker learning. For this reason, organisational support is positioned at the top of the model.

The model presents the intended outcomes as worker learning and organisational capability, ongoing learning and contributions to business sustainability. The natural process flow is 'top-to-bottom'. However, processes can also flow 'bottom to top'. This means that individual and organisational capability development also act, in reverse order, as catalysts for the continual drive and further development of managers' strategies, skills, commitments and management of changing contexts to effectively facilitate worker learning. Similarly, ongoing work related learning facilitation practices, backed up by anticipated improvements in worker capabilities, provide the rationale for the provision of ongoing organisational support for the practice and a justification for any review or modification of the organisation's capability development goals, if required. The two way flow is represented by two way arrows and this reinforces the idea that the facilitation of on-the-job informal work related learning can operate as an ongoing, circulating and evolving process.

The research project shows that it is possible for each component of the model to stand alone to make a contribution to the facilitation of worker learning and/or

organisational capability development. Ideally, however, worker and organisational learning could be maximised if each component is enabled to operate in concert and accord with other components. The ideal model suggests that each component is interrelated but not necessarily dependent upon other components.

The research project indicates that without a clearly articulated and demonstrated support from decision makers at a senior executive level, the practice of manager facilitation of informal ongoing on-the-job worker learning, may remain, as it appears in cases in this research project, an under-recognised and, therefore, an under-developed practice. The full value of the role is unlikely to be realised if the organisation continues to assume that it is sufficient to allow the facilitative learning role of managers to continue as one that lacks identity and visibility as a practice.

5.3 The contribution of this research project to improving understanding of manager facilitation of informal, ongoing work related learning

This research project offers a new way to describe manager facilitation of work related learning which offers a more effective way to understand the role. As noted in the 'Introduction' to this research project, the term 'facilitator of workplace learning' is not sufficient to describe or account for the multiple and complex ways in which managers facilitate learning and integrate work and learning in the context of everyday and ongoing work. This research project proposes that on-the-job learning is an ongoing and context based process. For this reason the term 'facilitating work related learning and developing working knowledges' more appropriately captures the concept of integration of work and learning and the 'ongoingness' of learning and facilitation in the current context.

The 'developing' of learning strategies and the continuous application of skills to support worker learning and engagement suggests a more active orientation to the facilitation practice. It produces a sense of a more committed and intentional approach by managers to continuously creating supportive learning conditions, fostering participation, reflection, and extending workers' knowledges, than do terms such as 'managing workplace training' which is often characterised by set time frames, structured delivery and assessment. The new way of referring to a manager's facilitative learning practice presents a more comprehensive view of the actual role and thus allows some differentiation from other managerial roles. The terms 'work related learning' and 'developing working knowledges' are, in the current workplace context more effectively representative of the ongoing strategies deployed by managers to actively integrate work and learning goals and to grow and develop awareness of the most effective ways to operate in particular contexts. This new term aligns more closely with recent theories of work related learning and human resource development concepts which emphasise the use of guided and socially situated learning to generate contextually rich learning in the company and support of others (Billett 2006; Ellinger et al. 2011; Eraut 2004, 2007; Lave & Wenger 1991).

The present research project demonstrates that managers, more or less, carry on the role of facilitating worker learning independently. They do this despite their experiences of limited acknowledgement or support from their line managers and from the organisation as a whole. Their ongoing interest, commitment and resilience to challenging circumstances are characteristics of their individual approaches and underpin their strategies for improving and sustaining their practices in facilitating worker learning.

An opportunity to improve and sustain manager practices, and the experiences of learners, lies in the organisation's ability to demonstrate a more concrete acknowledgement of the manager's actual role. A stronger recognition and acknowledgement by the organisation of the manager's overall role and objectives in facilitating worker learning would positively contribute to building

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manager confidence in developing and deploying strategies, and in applying skills which are most needed to meet diverse worker learning needs. A more effective acknowledgement of the role by senior managers may go some way to stimulating recognition that the role is important, even critical, in sustaining services and supporting teaching and learning in colleges. A more effective level of support could also promote the broadening of membership of practice communities and learning with, and through, social connections between workers. Analysis of cases suggests that this would bolster the visibility and importance of the role.

This research project has responded to suggestions in diverse literature that more needs to be known about the role and influences on managers who facilitate ongoing work related learning. The present research study contributes to:

- improving understanding of what line managers actually do and what challenges managers in facilitating on-the-job worker learning and the ongoing development of working knowledges for others.
- improving the current understanding of how TAFE NSW as an organisation supports Operations Managers in facilitating work related learning
- improving understanding of the underpinning motivations and influences on managers in their roles as facilitators of on-the-job worker learning and developers of working knowledges.
- enabling key components of the role to be identified, named and distinguished from other manager's day-to-day management practices; thus enabling the drawing of attention to this element of a manager's role if, and when, required for the implementation of strategies to better support the role
- raising the level of understanding of what has arguably been a largely under-defined, under-developed and an under-recognised process in organisations.

5.3.1 Observations and new questions raised by this research project

In reviewing the outcomes of this study a number of observations and additional questions arise about the role of managers as facilitators of ongoing, on-the-job work related learning. Each has some implication for workers, managers and organisations, and they are noted here for possible future consideration.

Observations from the research project indicate that:

1. Operations Managers place a high level of importance on fostering social connections between workers, and others, as a way to distribute the sometimes overwhelming task of facilitating ongoing worker learning in the context of every-day work. There is an expectation among Operations Managers that improving social connections between workers will lead to some form of useful learning for workers. Managers who are facilitators of learning need to balance their approaches to maximise productivity but also to minimise risks in promoting narrow ways of thinking and working which could occur if practice communities remain isolated from other communities. Ideally, managers would facilitate ways of thinking and working in communities which privilege and recognise diversity of thought and action.

2. The close working relationships formed in communities of practice may deter worker learners who do not want their work, skills and abilities observed and scrutinised by others. For example, some of the administration team at Blue Bay College often need to be 'pushed' by their manager into learning new processes. It is perhaps unlikely that such a group will be readily attracted to joining a work-based community of practice to collaboratively raise issues and solve problems together. Additionally, most Operations Managers struggle to describe communities for practice as forming from mutual interests, as is intended by Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998) and Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002). In the present research project Operations Managers

described how they fostered collaboration and the transferring of knowledge among group members. However, it is evident that few communities of practice form naturally without prompting or nurturing by managers. Communities of practice exist mainly as a mechanism for organising work.

3. The fostering of socio-cultural connections between workers and redesigning workspaces to improve social engagement and collaboration are afforded high levels of importance by managers in this research project. There is an assumption among Operations Managers that creating open plan offices and communal work spaces will benefit all workers and that such an environment will be suitable for most work types. Little has been documented in work related learning literature about the possible negative effects, for example, on worker productivity in open plan, densely accommodated, highly collaborative work areas such as large multi-work station customer service centres and administration offices. Similarly, open plan workshops with workers operating heavy machinery or instruments, such as those used in college trade training workshops, may not necessarily be conducive conditions for on-the-job socialised learning.

4. The process of learning in the context of work, frequently involves multiple stakeholders such as workers, colleagues, line managers and supervisors, organisational staff developers, organisational strategists and planners, trainers and teachers, community representatives and other members of workplace teams. A number of documents indicate that line managers are required to be involved in assisting workers to learn. The involvement of others is only implied. There is emphasis on sharing responsibility for worker learning, but how managers and other employees actually share their learning, and how learning is influenced by others needs to be further explored. The increasing involvement of external commercial clients in everyday work is also deserving of further inquiry to ascertain their role and influence. These roles of others in managing work related learning also needs to be better understood.

Further, the growing involvement of a range of 'others' in various processes of work related learning, suggests engagement in work related learning may not be as 'learner centred' as some of the work related learning literature implies.

5. As the cases demonstrate, not all workers see a need to change the way they work, nor are they necessarily always amenable to engaging with on-the-job learning processes such as job rotations, observations by managers, online programs or working closely with others. Managers need to be able to establish and maintain a diverse range of work related conditions to support different learner requirements, goals and learning styles. Importantly, managers need to be able to appropriately acknowledge the contributions made by workers in building organisational capability and in sustaining business operations. But first, this contribution needs to be more readily identified, qualified and perhaps quantified. The role needs to be differentiated from other, arguably, more readily recognised management roles such as planning, organising, managing people and systems. The perspective of workers in their engagement with, and their view of, ongoing work related learning strategies deployed by managers would add value to current understandings of the manager's role and their collective contribution to capability development.

6. This present research project has highlighted that Operations Managers actively develop and deploy strategies to facilitate worker learning and the organisation views this role as a valuable resource for building organisational capability. However, the roles managers play in facilitating worker learning, and their influence on workers, may need to be more closely monitored, accounted for, or evaluated, by the organisation to ensure fair and equitable learning practices are afforded to Operations team members.

7. Some TAFE NSW worker development strategies require individual approaches to managing performance and development. While some

managers address individual learning needs, (for example, for job performance requirements at Timbers College), most managers deploy facilitative learning strategies which are largely generic in nature. There is little differentiation between strategies for staff working in different disciplines and groups, such as the administration teams and the technical support teams.

8. Limitations such as insufficient time, resources, manager's own expertise and confidence were put forward as reasons why the facilitation of work related learning, for both individuals and for groups, sometimes stalls. These limitations raise questions about how practical, efficient and sustainable it is for line managers to be actively and directly involved in developing individual strategies for workers, particularly those operating in different disciplines and role types.

Additional questions raised by the research project include:

1. Whose interests are, in reality, being addressed by the facilitation of informal worker learning? The organisation, the manager, the worker or all three?

2. Should responsibility for the facilitation, delivery and evaluation of informal worker learning be placed in the hands of line managers when line managers are also responsible for making judgements about work performance? Should a line manager be a mentor, coach and guide for a direct report team member?

3. Is it appropriate and fair for co-workers to share what they have learned with other workers? Is it a fair workplace practice for co-workers to be expected to coach and guide others and do they have appropriate skills to achieve this?

4. There are multiple stakeholders involved in worker learning. Is worker learning, actually, as learner centred as some informal work related learning literature suggests?

5. On what criteria are the facilitative learning skills of managers and co-workers judged and by whom?

6. How are managers deemed competent to effectively facilitate informal, ongoing work related learning?

7. What consequences might arise for learners, managers and the organisation if informal learning activities are recorded and monitored?

8. What other strategies could be implemented in organisations to improve the level of importance afforded to line manager facilitation of informal worker learning and to further develop the role?

5.3.2 Concluding statements

The observations and questions raised by the outcomes of this study suggest that the issue of manager facilitation of informal work related learning is an area which is unsettled in terms of how it is understood by Operations Managers, by TAFE NSW and, possibly, by other vocational education organisations. On the one hand, Operations Managers have demonstrated that they deploy many sound strategies and apply a broad range of skills to facilitate worker learning. They are highly aware of the benefits to workers, themselves and the organisation if they do this well. They indicate interest and commitment in informally supporting the ongoing work related learning of their team members. But, on the other hand, some of the organisation's policies and procedures act to inhibit rather than support Operations Managers in this role. Overall, some senior managers, in the present study, demonstrate few actions which evidence concrete interest in further developing the skills of Operations Managers. At least one Staff Development Manager felt that Operations Managers did not need much assistance to improve their learning facilitation skills. Rather, this is regarded as a skill they can learn by themselves using their own research skills and resources. There are tensions between organisational expectations and the organisation's own strategies. All of the Staff Development Managers noted that non-teaching staff had often missed out on receiving training which could assist their development of facilitative and day-to-day business skills. The organisation has provided few programs or opportunities for Operations Managers to develop these skills, yet these are the types of skills which the organisation needs managers to acquire to effectively achieve the organisation's capability

goals. There are few signs that this situation will change if the profile of the role and its contribution remain under-developed.

In the current economic climate, it is understandable that senior executives may question the allocation of resources to a process which is neither easily recognised as a practice nor considered a core business for the organisation. Facilitating informal work related learning is currently viewed as only indirectly related to teaching and student learning. This may be one reason why the organisation has been slow to acknowledge non-teaching managers' roles and efforts in facilitating ongoing on-the-job informal worker learning. Another reason is that the facilitative learning role is not yet widely recognised in TAFE NSW colleges, and arguably elsewhere, as a key role for managers. As attested in interviews with Staff Development Managers in the present research project, the role is only just beginning to be recognised for its potential in contributing to ongoing development of staff. Several Staff Development Managers also noted that the role has been largely overlooked in terms of providing training and is still considered only of secondary importance to the provision of compliance related training and the training needs of teachers.

The observations and new questions raised are not intended as criticisms of how funds and attention are afforded to different cohorts of staff in TAFE NSW. Rather, they are raised as opportunities for further inquiry, particularly in the current context of continuous change and the potential value in building learning skills among a wide range of workers. The aim of the research project is to improve understanding of the role of an Operations Manager as a facilitator of informal work related learning, what aids and constrains the role, and how this part of a manager's role is supported by the organisation. The implications raised here are presented for future consideration by TAFE NSW as an organisation, by line managers and by workers themselves, should they be interested in improving how informal worker learning is facilitated, viewed, resourced and managed. Ultimately, a better understanding of the ways in

which organisations could further develop the way knowledge is transferred to others, could inform the way business capability is developed in the future.

5.4 Recommendations for managers and for TAFE NSW

Drawing on the findings and analysis of the case study, six recommendations are now made for managers and for TAFE NSW as a vocational training organisation. The recommendations are that:

1. Managers should plan and manage a situated learning approach to facilitating informal and ongoing work related learning; one which privileges learning in and from authentic work practices in administrative, services and technical support work areas in colleges.

2. Managers should foster a culture of collaboration among teams and other managers to create a sense of importance and criticality around sharing general and specific work related knowledges. Managers should promote a culture of 'learning and development' through day-to-day work. This means managers would need to allocate sufficient resources and time to facilitating learning so that workers are afforded useful and appropriate opportunities to learn on-the-job. It is anticipated this would assist workers to raise their awareness and understanding of organisational expectations and practices, and, importantly, awareness of the roles and work of others. The formation and nurturing of communities of practice are one way that collaborative learning and the transferring of knowledge between workers could be achieved.

3. TAFE NSW should assist Operations Managers to enhance their understandings and use of social networks at, and through everyday work and, as an organisation, foster development of positive and collaborative work relationships and effectively share this role with others.

4. Managers should promote worker participation in informal learning activities, and document where practical, outcomes arising from informal forms of learning. This could assist the overall organisation's ability to more readily recognise managers' strategies and, importantly, acknowledge worker participation in learning related activities. The recording and evaluation of informal learning activities, worker engagement and learning outcomes would assist the organisation to more effectively review informal learning activity. It would, therefore, also assist it to plan and manage future informal learning strategies.

5. TAFE NSW should make the facilitative learning role of Operations Managers more explicit in documents; that is, in planning, human resource and governance strategies, in position descriptions, and in workplace discourse to differentiate the role from other management roles and to better acknowledge the actual role. Further, the organisation needs to make it clear that informal learning is broader, and arguably more complex, than arranging 'training'. It is, however, acknowledged in this research project that identifying and arranging compliance related training in, for example, First Aid and Child Protection is also an important part of facilitating on-the-job learning to address mandated learning requirements.

6. TAFE NSW should support College Operations Managers to develop a range of strategies and skills to effectively share the role of facilitating worker learning with co-workers and others in the context of every-day work; that is in workshops, tool stores, commercial kitchens, laboratories, administrative units, systems and service areas.

A summary of relevant insights gained from this research project are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Thesis insights on how Operations Managers facilitate informal on-the-job work related learning in the context of TAFE NSW Colleges.

Consistent with a range of work related learning and organisational learning literature, which advocate learning through collaborative relationships at work, Operations Managers actively seek to create the types of workplace conditions which foster social connectivity between workers and to promote the sharing of ideas and knowledges. To efficiently address the ever increasing volumes of work and other demands arising from new business targets set for colleges, Operations Managers plan and deploy strategies which will support the development of on-the-job skills and knowledges among workers and, importantly, to encourage workers to also take on roles in supporting the learning of others. Two key factors which aid managers in the facilitation of worker learning is their own motivation to ensure productive practices at work and a commitment to contributing to organisational learning and capability goals. The identification of strategies and skills actually deployed has enabled the manager's role to be named, briefly described and now conceptualised. The role can now be understood as an aggregation of local manager practices and one which links or bridges the day-to-day tasks of workers with the goals and objectives of the organisation. That is, to optimise the way support is provided for teaching, learning and business processes in colleges.

The research project proposed, at the outset, that Operations Managers may not be adequately equipped for the role of a learning facilitator. However, analysis of cases clearly shows managers have developed, and implement, a wide range of strategies to facilitate worker learning and that they clearly understand what is required to address the types of learning required of team members. In this sense, Operations Managers have adequately equipped themselves with the skills they need to facilitate on-the-job worker learning. Despite acquiring and applying such skills, some Operations Managers note

that they are constrained by other work commitments, insufficient time and resources and, in some cases, their own level of confidence, to fulfill the role to the extent that they feel is appropriate. Several organisational employment related policies such as those that apply to shift work and casual employment arrangements, and a level of apathy among some older workers, hamper efforts made by Operations Managers to engage some workers in developmental activities. The type of support demonstrated by senior managers, and the level of acknowledgement of the role afforded by the organisation as a whole is noted by Operations Managers is in need of improvement.

In the current environment, characterised by ongoing change and economic challenges, it could be assumed that a government organisation would try to capitalise on the skills of line managers to facilitate informal and ongoing, on-the-job worker learning. But this research project confirms that while worker capability development is an aspiration of the both managers and the organisation, the organisation projects a sense that informal worker learning needs little support. A key challenge for Operations Managers in moving forward and further developing their roles as learning facilitators will be to manage within the framework of the existing level of support afforded by the organisation and to advocate for additional recognition for their important practice, and role, in contributing to ongoing worker learning. Staff Development Managers are unanimous that Operations Managers, and other non-teaching staff, are deserving of receiving more training and other support from the organisation as a whole. But, despite this acknowledgement, there is still a strong sense among Staff Development Managers that Operations Managers are adequately equipped, and self-sufficient, in developing their own strategies to improve the way they facilitate worker learning.

Operations Managers observe that some senior executives are also complacent in modelling or demonstrating any significant interest in manager facilitation of informal, ongoing worker learning. This is surprising given that one of the organisation's key strategic goals is to develop its own workforce capabilities by

ensuring that its own workers are competent and capable. The expectation is that line managers contribute to this goal. Operations Managers observe, however, that they are afforded limited guidance and little real acknowledgement of the role they are trying to fulfill and develop. Additionally, there are no clear mechanisms for accounting for, or monitoring, the ways in which managers plan and deploy strategies, nor for outcomes arising from such strategies.

Until now the role has been largely overshadowed by other managerial roles and there have been few reasons to differentiate the role, its purpose or contribution to wider organisational and economic aims. The naming of the manager's overall role as a 'developer of ongoing working knowledges' provides a new and succinct way for managers and organisations to refer to, and therefore, to more readily develop the way the role is understood within organisations, and, among managers and workers. As long as the role and manager's facilitative learning practices remain subsumed within other roles and expectations it is less likely to be afforded much attention by the managing organisation or by others.

The proposed framework for manager facilitation of informal, ongoing, on-the-job learning is underpinned by principles informed by the cases in this research project and recent work related learning literature. The framework highlights the importance of a valuing of the role, recognising the legitimacy of its purpose and the importance of equipping managers to fulfill the role. It also provides concrete examples of strategies which have worked well for Operations Managers and also recognises that challenges can constrain practices and processes.

As the cases demonstrate, the role of a manager as a facilitator of work related learning is inextricably influenced by a range of stakeholders and contexts including, for example, the organisation's community business partners, the

organisation's staff development objectives, departmental goals, discipline specific requirements within college teaching sections and worker learner interests, needs and capacities. The role is challenged by complex relationships between workers, and sometimes contradictory relationships between managers and the organisation's senior executives and business goals. These challenges and other influences need to be more closely examined, and understood, to inform any future developments of the purpose and practices which constitute the role.

The identification and naming of strategies and skills, which lead to what managers perceive are useful and successful on-the-job learning experiences for workers, have enabled the facilitative learning activities of managers to be now viewed as a 'practice'. The practice, the influences and the challenges facing managers form key components of the day-to-day role. The conceptualisation of the role as a 'bridge builder' and the naming of the role as a 'developer of working knowledges' emphasise the need for ongoing support from managers and the continuously evolving nature of the role managers play in facilitating learning in contemporary organisations. The framework, the conceptualisation of the role and the actual practice of managers in facilitating on-the-job work related learning now provide foundations for further exploring the facilitation of informal work related learning in organisations.

The study offers practical examples of socially situated and collaborative learning and makes clear that there is potential value in managers creating opportunities and fostering informal and ongoing worker learning. The outcomes of the study add to existing concepts in literature and practice based knowledge about context rich situated learning and organisational learning. Specifically, the study makes a contribution to better understanding the actual role of managers in how, and why, they facilitate ongoing, on-the-job worker learning.

Outcomes from this research project have also highlighted that overt organisational support, which is demonstrated and modelled by senior executives, is important in creating a sense of acknowledgement and recognition of the role and this is clearly stated as the key component in the proposed ideal model of manager facilitation of work related learning. Organisational support is similarly important to line managers to back them up in developing strategies to build ongoing working knowledges among their team members. Overt organisational support is anticipated to provide additional motivation for managers to devise innovative ways to contribute to addressing both immediate organisational productivity requirements and anticipated future learning and capability goals. The, until now, little understood actual role of managers in facilitating informal worker learning, and the now identified need to optimise the strategies and skills of managers in facilitating informal learning, could well apply in other business contexts.

Contemporary and future organisations could improve their preparedness for ongoing change in business operations by actively acknowledging, recognising and supporting the facilitative learning role and strategies of managers and, moreover, the potential for managers to contribute to ongoing worker and organisational capability development.

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Appendix 1: Typical College Operations services and number of staff

Service	Approximate number of staff
Clerical Support for teachers	5-10 permanent or temporary positions
Customer Service and Administration	15-20 permanent positions and 5- 10 temporary positions for high volume processing stages (for example, semester enrolments, exam supervision)
Course Information	2-3 permanent and 2 temporary positions
Technical Class Support	10-20 permanent and temporary positions and up to 40 additional staff for support intensive teaching sections which require staff to manage science laboratories, commercial kitchens, engineering workshops and similar
Security Services	2-3 permanent and temporary positions
Childrens' Centres	5-7 staff for a 26 child place centre
Student Association	1-2 permanent and 1 temporary positions
Counselling (where this Institute responsibility is part of the role of a senior College Operations Manager)	5-7 College positions
Library Services (where this Institute responsibility is part of the role of a senior College Operations Manager)	5-7 College positions
Maintenance	1-2 permanent positions. Contractor staff are monitored but not directly supervised
Contracts – Bookshops, canteens and other services	Contract staff employed by contractor. No direct line management responsibility

Appendix 2: UTS Human Research Ethics Committee - Approval to Conduct Research

26 April 2007

Professor Paul Hager
CB10.05.589
Faculty of Education
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

Dear Paul,

UTS HREC REF NO 2007-57 – HAGER, Professor Paul (for CARTER, Ms Rosalind EdD student) - "The role of supervisors in facilitating learning at work"

Thank you for your response to my email dated 18 April 2007. Your response satisfactorily addresses the concerns and questions raised by the Committee, and I am pleased to inform you that ethics clearance is now granted.

Your clearance number is UTS HREC REF NO. 2007-57A

Please note that the ethical conduct of research is an on-going process. The *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* requires us to obtain a report about the progress of the research, and in particular about any changes to the research which may have ethical implications. This report form must be completed at least annually, and at the end of the project (if it takes more than a year). The Ethics Secretariat will contact you when it is time to complete your first report.

I also refer you to the AVCC guidelines relating to the storage of data, which require that data be kept for a minimum of 5 years after publication of research. However, in NSW, longer retention requirements are required for research on human subjects with potential long-term effects, research with long-term environmental effects, or research considered of national or international significance, importance, or controversy. If the data from this research project falls into one of these categories, contact University Records for advice on long-term retention.

If you have any queries about your ethics clearance, or require any amendments to your research in the future, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the Research and Innovation Office, on 02 9514 9615.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jane Stein-Parbury
Chairperson
UTS Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 3: NSW DET Approval to conduct research

DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL
TAFE and Community Education

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

TAFE NSW

Ms Ros Carter
256 Albany Rd
PETERSHAM NSW 2049

DOC 07/50799

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.

Dear Ms Carter

I refer to your application to conduct research in TAFE NSW titled *Investigating Learning at Work.*

Approval has been granted for you to conduct research in TAFE NSW subject to the following requirements:

1. The privacy of the Institute and staff must be protected.
2. The participation of staff must be voluntary and at the Institute's convenience.
3. A copy of this letter must be included with the documents you send to Institute Directors.
4. A copy of the thesis should be forwarded to me at the Department of Education and Training, Level 2 35 Bridge Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

The approval is current until the 30 June 2008 and will cover Ros Carter. Please note that Institute Directors have the right to withdraw their Institute from the study at any time.

If you have any queries, please contact Robin Booth Associate Director, TAFE Educational Capability, TAFE and Community Education on 02 92445036 or by e-mail at robin.booth@det.nsw.edu.au.

I wish you all the best with your postgraduate project.

Yours sincerely

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.

Marie Persson
Deputy Director-General
TAFE and Community Education
November 2007

• Level 2, 35 Bridge Street • Sydney NSW 2000 • GPO Box 33 • Sydney NSW 2001 •
• *telephone* 02 9561 8150 • *facsimile* 02 9561 8576 • www.det.nsw.edu.au •

INFORMATION LETTER
For

POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR IN FACILITATING LEARNING AT WORK

Dear ……..,

My name is Rosalind Carter and I am a student at the University of Technology, Sydney.

I am conducting research into the *role of supervisors in facilitating learning at work* and would welcome your assistance. Your role in the research will involve providing some preliminary information about your role at work via a phone interview and answering questions in a semi structured interview which should take no more than about 60 min of your time. Some follow up phone calls and email exchanges may require about 30 – 60 minutes of your time over about 3 months.

This research is being funded by myself.

If you are interested in participating, I would be pleased if you would sign the attached *Consent Form - Student Research* and return to me in the envelope provided.

You are under no obligation to participate in this research.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the UTS Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9615, and quote this number *UTS HREC 2007 – 57A.*

Yours sincerely,

Rosalind Carter
Student
Faculty of Education
University of Technology, Sydney
Rosalind.J.Carter@student.uts.edu.au

Appendix 5: Letter requesting participant consent

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

CONSENT FORM - STUDENT RESEARCH for Potential Participants

I ……………………………………. agree to participate in the research project 'Investigating learning at work' UTS HREC Approval Reference Number 2007-57A being conducted by Rosalind Carter, 256 Albany Rd, Petersham, NSW 2049 ph 9560 7382, student of the University of Technology, Sydney for her degree Doctor of Education.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to gather information from a selection of TAFE staff about their experiences with facilitating learning at work.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve either completing a questionnaire or being interviewed for approximately 45-60 minutes. The anticipated current and future risk of harm caused by participation in this research is expected to be nil.

I am aware that I can contact Rosalind Carter or her supervisor Professor Paul Hager, University of Technology, Sydney ph 9514 3826 if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that Rosalind Carter has explained the purpose of the research and my participation adequately and or answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify staff in any way.

_____   ____/____/____

Signature (participant)

_____   ____/____/____

Signature (researcher or delegate)

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: 02 9514 9615, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Topic Theme	Code	Sub-code
Context and Setting	**CXT**	
Perspectives and Common views	**P**	
Opinions and perspectives	**P**	**P- OP**
Common views	**P**	**P-CV**
Ways of thinking about others	**W**	
Influences and Objects	**W**	**W-I+O**
Process	**Pr**	
Funding	Pr	**Pr-F**
Activities - Evidence of supportive learning strategy deployed	**SD**	
Work challenges/ participation/Opportunities	SD	**SD- WC+P**
Job rotations	SD	**SD-JR**
Honest conversations	SD	**SD- HC +F**
Training Plans	SD	**SD-TP**
Motivate	SD	**SD-M**
Observe	SD	**SD-O**
Change Physical environment	SD	**SD-PE**
Change Social / Cultural environment	SD	**SD-SCE**
Networking	SD	**SD- N**
Utilise own experience	SD	**SD-OE**
Coach	SD	**SD-C**
Mentor	SD	**SD-M**
Guide	SD	**SD-G**
Model	SD	**SD-Mod**
Identify Training needs	SD	**SD- IdTN**
Recognise skills of others and share	SD	**SD- R+S**
Reward and acknowledge	SD	**SD-R+A**
Organisational awareness	SD	**SD-OA**
Relationships	**REL**	
with Individuals	REL	**REL-RI**
with groups	REL	**REL-RG**
with organisation	REL	**REL-RO**
Events- Why (because, since, due to….)	**OC**	
Org Change	OC	**OC-OC**
Systems Change	OC	**OC-S**
Strategies -Skills needed to be a facilitator	**SkF**	
Know your staff	SkF	**SkF-KS**
Motivate	SkF	**SkF-M**
Communication	SkF	**SkF-C**
Collaboration	SkF	**SkF-Collab**
Observation	SkF-	**SkF-O**

Implement Change	SkF-	**SkF-IC**
Honesty	SkF	**SkF-H**
Innovate	SkF	**SkF-I**
Leadership and management	SkF	**SkF-Mgt**
Train others	SkF	**SkF-T**
Understanding process and practice	SkF	**SkF-P+P**
Indentify learning needs	SkF	**SKF-ILN**
Network	SkF	**SkF-N**
Supportive Environment	SkF	**SkF-SE**

Events - Organisational support - staff development perspective	**OS**	
Study leave and work conditions	OS	**OS- WC**
ILDPs and Training Plans	OS	**OS- TP**
E-learning and training programs	OS	**OS - EL**
Formal Skills Recognition	OS	**OS - RPL**
Recognise informal effort	OS	**OS- R**
Performance Development	OS	**OS - PD**
Induction	OS	**OS-IN**
Compliance training	OS	**OS-CT**
Knowledge management	OS	**OS-KM**
Compliance training	OS	**OS-CT**
Capability Dev programs eg mentorships	OS	**OS-CD**
Find out for your self	OS	**OS-FFY**
Leadership and Mgt	OS	**OS-L+M**
Change	OS	**OS-C**
Local Projects	OS	**OS- LP**
Consultancy	OS	**OS-C**

Evidence of constraints	**C**	
Time	C	**C-T**
Funds	C	**C-F**
Motivation	C	**C-M**
Physical Environment	C	**C-PE**
Cultural Environment	C	**C-CE**
Social Environment	C	**C-SE**
Electronic systems	C	**C-E**
Age	C	**C-A**
Senior management	C	**C-SM**
Communication	C	**C-C**
Diversity	C	**C-D**
Organisational structures	C	**C-OS**
Organisational objectives	C	**C-OO**
Literacy	C	**C-L**
Recognition	C	**C-R**

Why Constraint (because of…)	**WC**	
Organisational structures	WC	**WC - OS**
Systems and procedures	WC	**WC-S+P**
Need Evidence	WC	**WC-NE**

Theory - relates to Situated learning - SL, WP, OL or AL

	Theory	
Social environment	SL	**SL - SE**
Modelling from Snr management	SL	**SL- Mod**
Learning strategies (experience)	AL	**AL - Exp**
e-learning	AL	**AL- e-I**
Communities of practice	SL	**SL - Cop**
Participation	SL	**SL - P**
Participation	WPL	**WPL-P**
Org Learning	OL	**OL**
Org Expectations	**OE**	**OE**
Position Description	OE	**OE -PD**
Org Strategy	OE	**OE-OS**
Org Directions	OE	**OE-OD**
Local Org Process		**OE-LOP**
Mgr Responsibility	OE	**OE- MR**
Opinions and perspectives	O+P	
Opinions and perspectives	O+P	**O+P**

Interview Questions

Research Question/ Topic: The role of the manager in facilitating work related learning

Starting the Interview

Introduction by the Interviewer

The introduction will set the scene, provide background, explain key words and explain the purpose of the research. As interviewer, I will introduce the topic, research design, overall objectives, the interviewee role and how confidentiality will be maintained. As interviewer, I will also explain that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time.

Semi- Structured Interview Questions

Consistent with an interpretive approach to data collection and analysis, semi structured interviews will be used to gather participant perspectives on process and involvement in a range of learning related workplace supervisory roles.

Preliminary questions to describe collective processes and participant role may include:

- What is the primary service provided by this organisation?
- Would you briefly describe what work you do at this college? What is your role? How long have you worked in Operational positions?
- How many staff do you generally have in your immediate team and extended team? Are they long term or short term employees/ team members? (may also discuss age, gender, experience)
- What would you say are your most important jobs/ tasks/ roles?
- What type of workplace learning opportunities are available to you and or your team? or
- What type of work related learning opportunities does your unit provide for non teaching staff?

Documents may be used in the process of the interview to discuss roles and or college context. Documents may include:

- Operations Manager Position Description
- Institute Learning and Innovation/ Staff Development annual course list, or
- Institute Learning and Innovation/ Staff Development program flyer/ training session
- College Business Plan or equivalent/ Strategy document

- Performance Management Document (if implemented at time of interview)
- Another document that directly or indirectly refers to facilitation by supervisors of work based learning.

Intermediate questions about participant involvement in workplace learning facilitation may include:

- Can you tell me about a significant learning experience of your own? Over a short term or longer term. Why? What was important / significant to you about that experience?
- In what ways are you able to provide new /challenging / learning experiences for staff in your area? Are you able to do this and How? How does it work for you/ them? (resources, time, interest, outcomes). What usually happens?
- Have you ever had any training in mentoring or guiding or coaching? Have you ever been a mentee or mentor? If yes, what did you do?
- Do you know what would normally be required of you as say, a mentor at work?
- What support have you been given by the organisation to assist you as a facilitator of workplace/ informal learning? or
- How does your unit support staff to facilitate learning for others?

Questions to discuss involvement of others may include:

- Aids and constraints: What are some of the barriers and enablers for you / your unit in facilitating learning at work for others?
- COPs: Are you aware of the term 'communities of practice' (COP)? What do you understand by the term 'communities of practice'? Would you say there are active COPs in your area?
- If COPs exist, what do you do to support communities of practice in your area or responsibility?
- Spatial distance: How do you engage geographically dispersed and non dispersed team / community members in learning related opportunities?
- Teams and working together: How do the most effective teams work together? In your experience what are the some of the characteristics of the most effective groups/teams or communities of practice?
- Workplace conditions: What workplace conditions do you find best support or don't support working and learning?
- Why do these work so well? Don't work?

Additional Information:

Other issues for discussion

- What have been the main challenges for you in your role as an Operations Manager?

- Who, if anyone, has been the most helpful to you as a manager?
- What are you views on workplace learning?
- What are your views on mentoring, coaching or guiding as methods for facilitating learning?

Ending the Interview

- Is there anything about this interview/ discussion that has prompted you to think differently about facilitating workplace learning?
- Is there anything you would like to add or do you have questions for me?

Document searches - Criteria and search questions

- Inclusion of key words or references such as mentoring, coaching, guiding, learning at work, staff development, informal learning, mentoring, guiding, coaching, facilitation, performance management, skills currency, VET non-teaching staff, capability development,
- Evidence of programs available for non-teaching staff
- Budget for non-teaching staff training
- Participation rates
- Inquiries, needs analysis, Institute strategies
- Outcomes of facilitated learning programs

Second round questions

Some second round questions if required, will focus on issues that require further explanation or clarification for the researcher and or the participant.

Ending the interview and document review

I will conclude interviews with staff by explaining that interview data will be used confidentially with their permission and explain that there may need to be further communication. I will ask if participants will be willing to be contacted. I will also explain that interviews may raise issues that participants later reflect on, and consider inappropriate for inclusion in transcripts. I will explain that participants can contact me and I will delete relevant data. I will confirm this with relevant participants.

Research Instruments

Research Question/ Topic: The role of the manager in facilitating work related learning

Starting the Interview: Introduction by the Interviewer

The introduction will set the scene, provide background, explain key words and explain the purpose of the research. As interviewer, I will introduce the topic, research design, overall objectives, the interviewee role and how confidentiality will be maintained. As interviewer, I will also explain that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time.

Semi- Structured Interview Questions for Manager, Staff Learning and Development

Consistent with case study methodology and grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis, semi structured interviews will be used to gather participant perspectives on process and involvement in a range of learning related workplace supervisory roles. Documents may be used in the process of the interview to discuss roles and or college context. Documents may include:

- Operations Manager Position Description
- Institute Learning and Innovation/ Staff Development annual course list,
- or
- Institute Learning and Innovation/ Staff Development program flyer/ training session
- College Business Plan or equivalent/ Strategy document
- Performance Management Document (if implemented at time of interview)
- Another document that directly or indirectly refers to facilitation by supervisors of work based learning.
- Institute survey results

Preliminary questions to describe collective processes and participant role may include:

- What is the primary service provided by this organisation?
- Would you briefly describe what work you do at this college? What is your role? How long have you worked in Staff Learning and Development roles?

- What would you say are your most important jobs/ tasks/ roles?
- What type of workplace learning opportunities does XX provide for non teaching staff at XX?

Intermediate questions about participant involvement in workplace learning facilitation may include:

- In what ways do you or could you provide new /challenging / learning experiences for staff in XX Institute? How does it work for you/ them? (resources, time, interest, outcomes). What usually happens?
- Do you see a need for training or support for non teaching staff in mentoring or guiding or coaching?
- What support is the XX Institute Staff Learning and Development unit able to provide to assist non teaching managers such as Operations Managers as facilitators of workplace learning?
- Can you tell me about a significant learning experience of your own? Over a short term or longer term. Why? What was important / significant to you about that experience?

Questions to discuss involvement of others may include:

- Aids and constraints: What are some of the barriers and enablers for you / your unit in providing support for facilitating learning at work for others?
- COPs: Are you aware of the term 'communities of practice' (COP) or situated learning? Would you say COPs form naturally in non teaching areas?
- If COPs exist, what do you do to support communities of practice in your area or responsibility?
- Spatial distance: How do you engage geographically dispersed and non dispersed staff in learning related opportunities?
- Teams and working together: How do the most effective teams work together? In your experience what are some of the characteristics of the most effective groups/teams or communities of practice?
- Workplace conditions: What workplace conditions do you find best support or don't support working and learning?
- As the manager of Staff learning and Development, what skills do you think non teaching managers (such as Operations Managers) need to develop to manage contemporary and future work environments? And to what extent can your unit support non teaching managers in these roles.
- What strategies work well and why? Or Don't work so well, why?

Additional Information:

Other issues for discussion

- What have been the main challenges for you in your role as an Operations Manager?
- Who, if anyone, has been the most helpful to you as a manager?
- What are your views on workplace learning?
- What are your views on mentoring, coaching or guiding as methods for facilitating learning?

Ending the Interview

- Is there anything about this interview/ discussion that has prompted you to think differently about facilitating workplace learning?
- Is there anything you would like to add or do you have questions for me?

Questions guiding the review of documents

- Inclusion of key words or references such as mentoring, coaching, guiding, learning at work, staff training, staff development, informal learning, workplace learning, mentor, guide, coach, facilitation, performance management, skills currency, non teaching staff, careers.
- Evidence of programs available for non teaching staff to build learning facilitation skills
- Budget for non teaching staff training.
- Participation rates.
- Inquiries, needs analysis, Institute strategies.
- Outcomes of facilitated learning programs.

Second round questions

Some second round questions if required, will focus on issues that require further explanation or clarification for the researcher and or the participant.

Ending the interview and document search

I will conclude interviews with staff by explaining that a transcript of the interview will be forwarded to each participant with the option to review and edit (tracked) if required. I will also explain that interview data will be used confidentially with their permission and explain that there may need to be further communication and ask if participants will be willing to be contacted. I will also explain that interviews may raise issues that participants later reflect on and consider inappropriate to be included in data transcripts. I will discuss

Participants can contact me and I will delete relevant data and confirm this with participant.

Follow-up interview questions - after 6 months (9 November 2008)

Operations Manager

- What progress have you made over the past 12 months with the implementation of the Performance Development scheme?
- What changes have you noticed?
- Are staff doing anything different? Increase in participation? Interest? Enthusiasm?
- Have you deployed any new strategies or made any new approaches with respect to workplace learning?
- What do you do/ what have you done to assist a staff member's learning eg when it becomes apparent that they don't know how to do something or need assistance? (direct or indirect assistance).
- Why did you need to facilitate learning / training?
- Would you change anything?
- Does the organisation support you in developing staff skills? How? Why?
- Have you noticed any change to the need to facilitate workplace learning with staff in the last 12 months or in recent years?
- What do you do now? How? Other issues?
- Any thoughts about structuring workplace learning in your college?

Appendix 9: Sample interview transcription with an Operations Manager

Interview number 4 Oakman City College

RC - What sort of workplace learning conditions best support or not support workplace learning?

XY – fear of failure **–**if you take away the fear of failure…it doesn't matter I you get it all wrong - we are learning here and I think that's the best support there is …there is this sort of catch network a sort of safety sheet or whatever that yes they will get it wrong …they will get things wrong with the system …there will be things that we do wrong during enrolment but my approach is that '…well you got this wrong shout and scream and load it all back on to them.. they are feeling bad enough that they got it wrong ….to smooth out and find a solution.

RC – we are a learning environment …learning institution …

XY- that's right ... showing me and showing the team leaders … and the team leaders need to be doing this as well …they need to continue to reflect and respond to that no matter how frustrating …

There will be some people who need a closer eye than others. I've got the Cashier this time who is below the Team Leader Services to oversee…because I think his approach is more that way.

RC_ ok so you picked an individual who is good at coping with new people and learning things

XY - and creating an environment where it isn't 'fault'. Yes it is going to be a lot of work.