The iatrogenic effect of evaluation in performative organizational climates

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Helen M Goodman
Dip Soc Studs; BA; MSW; Grad Dip in Human Services Research (Monitoring and Evaluation)

Research Office
Science, Engineering and Technology Portfolio
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

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Declaration of Authorship

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere, nor does any of it arise from any research work for which I have been awarded another degree or diploma. It contains only work which has been carried out while engaged in a research program for this degree.

No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

Signed:

Date:
Acknowledgements

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Abstract

This thesis is an insider account of a poor outcome of an evaluation effort within a public sector project in a Department despite its reputation for innovation and strength in program evaluation. The research became a quest to find ways to explain the poor outcome and to find ways to avoid its future recurrence. My thesis is that in performative organizational climates, evaluation becomes shaped as a social defence against anxiety, risking the unintended side effect of contributing to organizational dysfunction. It is in this sense of unintended side effects that I use the word iatrogenic, as meaning something which is intended to be helpful, but ends up being harmful.

I argue that in becoming too closely associated with the organization’s pressures to perform in a particular light, the evaluation presence, shaped into an administrative routine, contributed to three interrelated harms: a distorted account of a project; a diminution of, and hence harm to, work relationships; and through this, a negative impact on the work tasks themselves. It was the performative organizational climate, interacting with the everyday ways in which humans defend against uncertainty and failure, which produced these particularly perverse and harmful outcomes.

To guide the discussion and analysis, I borrow a framework used by Boxer (2004), the key elements of which are two compass axes. These axes represent dimensions of organizational life and also point to the tensions in the case study. I have named the North-South axis the ‘performative axis’ and the East-West axis the ‘relational axis’. In the North of the performative axis is the dominant Government aspirations, policies and influences. Among these influences are competition for public sector funds, the productivist orientation of the Departmental accountability requirements, and a “projectified” work environment (Lundin & Soderholm, 1998) where short term funding cycles, an offshoot of the demands of the North, fuel the rapid turnover of issues, people and relationships. In the South are the dominant influences at the Departmental level, including project management as a dominant management model, and mandatory evaluation of all Departmental programs. To the East are located the staff in their one to one or group relationships with the program clients in neighbourhoods and communities, and to the West, the program client is located within a family group, community, and business. Work on the East-West axis is particularly prone to the sort of anxiety that inter-dependent relationships trigger, such as exist between staff and program clients seeking to work together on
program goals. The activity of this axis is typically screened out of the picture gleaned for performative accountability stories for the dominant North-South axis.

I initially located myself on the East-West axis where my research task was to examine, together with practitioners, the system requirements – both people and technological – for the development of formative program evaluation. However, it was system requirements of the North-South administrative axis which came to dominate, and in so doing, operated to override the less formal, more relational dimensions of the work which characterize the East-West axis concerns.

I argue, as does Reason (1990) in his work on decision failures in organizations, that no one cause in itself is sufficient to bring about particular problematic organizational outcomes, such as the harms which occurred in this case study. I use Reason’s image of the layers of Swiss cheese. Reason holds that when the layers are placed in such a way that the holes line up, these holes become a passage for error, and in this configuration, poor outcomes occur. The layers of cheese, in this case study, are made up of layers or domains of work – those domains being the project level domain, the level of the Departmental wide Evaluation Unit, and at the senior executive level. It is when there are weaknesses in the fabric of each of these domains, and when they become aligned, much as holes in Swiss cheese might be aligned, that the greatest problems occur.

At the project level, I examine how the pressures within the project triggered a range of defensive responses, which occluded the interactive relationship work on which the project depended. I provide examples of defences such as detachment and denial of feelings of staff and clients, persecutory responses from project managers suggestive of their experience of being attacked, and a severing of Departmental relationships with a key group of clients when this work was questioned externally.

At the level of the Evaluation Unit, my analysis suggests that the language of the market had suffused the Evaluation Unit rationale and practice, thereby lessening the scope for alternative ways to approach both to project work and its evaluation, and diminishing the recognition of existing complexity. I found that the Evaluation Unit had become caught in the Department’s need for information for communication and public relations, needs which instrumentalized and diminished particularly the relational aspects of the work.
At the senior executive level I have analysed the publicly portrayed opinions, published work, and stories of the Senior Executive, and suggest that he has sought to marry the need for organizational accountability with the presence of evaluation. In so doing he contributes to the iconic qualities evaluation has taken on in this Department, thus further diminishing the learning from our social relatedness to each other in the performance of our work tasks.

Systems psychodynamic literature has been the most productive of insight for me in coming to a greater understanding of the loss of intelligence and transparency experienced in the performative organizational climate. I have drawn most heavily on Object Relations as the theoretical basis for my arguments, for its clear and apt application to organizational systems. A key element in the theory is the prevalence of anxiety, inherent in our makeup and in the organizations in which we work. It explains how this becomes manifest as both an existential state (in that we share as humans an inherent valency to anxiety) and also as a social state (in that we develop organizational systems and structures which help us defend against the painful experience of anxiety). Object Relations theory points to the individual and system properties which when combined in certain ways, work to diminish our social relatedness and lessen our capacity to see things as wholes. Under these conditions it is difficult to tolerate strong feelings, manage uncertainty and ambivalence, and maintain our natural empathy. The thesis provides evidence of the perverse effect on relationships and program outcomes which arise in these circumstances.

The thesis makes two suggestions for evaluation practice to strengthen its capacity to elicit the human and communal strengths to face adversity. One suggestion is to encourage a stronger dialogue on responsibility, as a way to provide ballast for the task of questioning the empty shell that the word accountability, in many circumstances, has become. The second suggestion is for work places to strengthen their learning spaces as “holding environments”, while individuals themselves, in inter-relationship with each other, work out what needs to be done. Both these suggestions can be furthered by the encouragement of more research on evaluation theory and practice, and can be acted upon if evaluation takes up the challenge to encourage a particular form of its participation in organizational life, participation which suggests that those carrying out evaluative inquiry work alongside practitioners, and together with them, work toward an exploration of the challenges they experience in meeting program and societal goals.
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Thesis overview

1.1.1 Introduction

The word iatrogenic in the title of the thesis seeks to name a complex process where what is intended to be helpful ends up being harmful. This idea has remained vivid for me since encountering it in Illich’s (1977) work while I was working as a medical social worker in an acute hospital, where it was not uncommon for people to experience a new illness arising from an intervention designed to cure or mitigate the presenting medical problem. While I have found reference to the idea outside medicine (Bollinger and Chandra, 2005; Cronin, 2001), it has not, however, previously been used in relation to evaluation practice. In associating the word iatrogenic, with the word performative, in the title of the thesis, I am seeking to capture the negative (iatrogenic) effects of evaluation practice marketed as a performance enhancing organizational pursuit. I argue that where evaluation becomes part of the tasks of organizational image making, it risks the unintended side effects of contributing to organizational dysfunction.

My thesis is that in these performative organizational climates, evaluation practice becomes shaped to serve the function of a social defence against anxiety. This thesis has been developed from an insider story of the interaction between a performative organizational climate and the presence of program evaluation as a project requirement. The researcher was also an actor in a high stakes project environment which was characterized by highly pressured relationships with a range of stakeholders, including government and other funders. While the project leaders initially judged the context as one in which the feedback from the project clients was seen as essential to the future direction of the project, the reality was that eliciting and valuing of the diverse range of perspectives on the project proved too difficult to maintain in the face of the contextual requirement to offer a justificatory evaluation product. Instead, critical discussion was suppressed, and evaluation practice was shaped by the pressures of performativity to produce a distorted representation of the project.

While I explain the term ‘social defence against anxiety’ in some detail in Chapter 3, I introduce it here to set out clearly and in a timely way the direction taken by the research task. This task became one of seeking to understand the forces which drove and shaped the usage of evaluation in this way. I argue that the system defences to which evaluation contributed came about in large part due to the organization’s need to survive in the “Market State” (Boxer, 2004). The thesis
provides insight into how work environments with low tolerance for uncertainty and complexity, not only strain the task of evaluative enquiry, but in fact reshape it in ways which introduce iatrogenic effects. I provide evidence in the thesis to demonstrate that the reshaped evaluation added three interrelated harms: it contributed to a distorted account of a project; it contributed to a diminution of and hence harm to work relationships; and through this, contributed to a negative impact on the work tasks themselves.

Why is this research aim, and the subsequent six years of struggle to understand at least some of the dimensions of this problem, worth the effort? I offer three reasons for this. Firstly, the growth in evaluation research points to the importance of understanding the contexts in which this is occurring, and an understanding of what might be fuelling this drive. The second reason is the under representation in the evaluation literature of studies of the process of evaluation. The third reason I offer is the potential for this sort of process use to be a deeply problematic development which has both the potential to cause considerable shame, and also to contribute harmful effects to program environments.

### 1.1.2 Growth in evaluation

As a number of writers have suggested, a manager of a public sector agency would have considerable difficulty, in the current climate, of admitting that evaluation did not form part of their program development (Pollitt, 1995). As Carol Weiss (2003) has commented, One of the amazing things that has happened to evaluation is that it has pervaded the program world. Just about every organization that funds, runs, or develops programs now calls for evaluation. This is true locally, nationally, and internationally; it is almost as true of foundations and voluntary organizations as it is of government agencies. The press for evaluation apparently arises from the current demand for accountability. Programs are increasingly called on to justify their existence, their expenditure of funds, and their achievement of objectives (p.2)

Along with the growth of evaluation practice across a range of organizational types, as Weiss outlines, Russon (2003) offers a parallel description by drawing reference to the “worldwide community” of evaluation, symbolized by the formation of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation. Russon informs us that prior to 1995, there were only five regional and national evaluation organizations: American Evaluation Association, (AEA), Australasian
Evaluation Society (AES), Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), Central American Evaluation Association (ACE), and European Evaluation Society (EES). “Today there are about 50!”(p.12)

1.1.3 Process use in evaluation literature

At the same time as this enormous proliferation of evaluation activity, there has been the development in evaluation in the last decade of a more focused conceptualization of the idea of process use of evaluation – that is, attention to the impact of the process of evaluation, apart from the impact of the use of evaluation findings. Patton (1997), a leading evaluation figure, brought this idea into his popular text in 1997. He distinguishes process use from findings use, and locates its presence in the form of changes in thinking and behavior, and also in program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, changes which are seen to stem from the learning that occurs during the evaluation process.

This thesis can be seen as falling into an underdeveloped aspect of evaluation research, research which seeks to provide an account of a particular sort of process use of evaluation. Studies of process use of evaluation typically focus on positive accounts of evaluation interventions which have contributed to learning (eg, Owen and Lambert, 1995), accounts which are largely focused at the program or project level. This thesis examines this process use from a more critical perspective. It seeks to show an understanding of some of the dynamics of this exponential growth of evaluation, and to demonstrate how it is pulled more toward a function of assisting an organization in the pursuit of its image management. I argue that this pursuit of image management forms a cornerstone in the creation of which I now see as an organizational enactment of creating a system of defence. This explanation was not one I sought to examine at the outset of my research. It was an outcome of my research, and in some ways, an uninvited guest. It is, and remains, a difficult perspective to hold. This is in part because as humans we aspire to view our efforts positively, and seek to avoid the discomfort of aspects of life we do not understand.

My research in this thesis takes its place among the small but growing evaluation literature which seeks to problematise the links between evaluation and those occasions in which it becomes aligned with what Dahler-Larsen (2002) refers to as organicentric values. One aspect of those values is the claim that the presence of evaluation can symbolize that an organization is behaving in an accountable manner. I seek to show that evaluation can in fact contribute to organizational environments which are harmful to accountability, and I offer theoretical and
empirical evidence which constitute an alternative account of evaluation – that it can act as a social defence against anxiety.

1.1.4 Evaluation shame, and project harm

The thesis contributes to the idea of that shame can be a byproduct of evaluation becoming enmeshed in these organizational dynamics, a factor which Dahler-Larsen (2002) has already referred to, but which has not been developed in the literature. The thesis explores some of the dangers for evaluation practice in colluding with the strong forces which drive evaluation in the directions illuminated in this study.

I found that the evaluation contributed to distortion in the representation of the project, contributed harm to the work relationships, and through these, harm to the work tasks. I conceptualized these harmful outcomes of evaluation occurring in three related but different environments within the case study. The three environments in which I explored the way evaluation was taken up, and distorted, were at the project level, at the level of the Evaluation Unit within the Department, and at the corporate, senior executive level. The accounts I provide at the project level include the pressures on the evaluation to offer an “unblemished” (House, 1974) account of the project, denuded of its complexity and contention. The account at the level of the Department wide evaluation unit provides insight into the pressures on the evaluation presence as exerted through the wider organizational processes, and how the evaluation presence ingests and responds to these pressures. Details are offered of both the official and informal reasons given for the attraction of evaluation to Departmental processes, the rolling out of evaluation as a mandatory requirement across all projects. I also offer an account of how particular evaluation tools and processes are able to offer assistance in the tasks of responding to those pressures. Finally, at the senior executive level, I provide detail and analysis of the particular pressures experienced by senior Departmental officers, facing stringent competition from other government departments for private and public sector monies. Evaluation was seen as a key tool in the management of these pressures.

I borrow an image from error chain analysis of decision failures in emergency management studies (Reason, 1990), to represent these three different contexts: the image is that of Swiss cheese. The layers of cheese represent the contexts which are found at different distances from the issue under scrutiny, but which exert an influence on the issue, and the holes represent a particular valency, weakness, or tendency of the system represented in that layer. If in the course of placing each layer of cheese, one on top of the other, the holes become aligned, this is when
the greatest risks are likely to occur. In the case discussed in this thesis, the three layers represent a domain of analysis: the project level, the level of the Departmental evaluation structures and processes, and the level of the corporate systems and their use of evaluation. Each layer on its own, with its inherent structural weaknesses around the hole in the cheese slice is not enough to cause the three harms I have referred to - the distortion account of the project story, the diminution of and harm to work relationships, and the contribution to a negative impact on the work tasks. In discussing the weaknesses or valencies, that is, the holes in the various layers, I emphasise that these valencies are of our own making, and include basic responses such as assumptions which are not shared, turning a blind eye, creating illusions, participating in agreements which remain unspoken. How these different levels, a stressed project environment (chapter 5), the particular evaluation technologies (chapter 6), and the organizational drive to present a positive image (chapter 7) became aligned in a certain way, and the harms which were done in the process, are the subject of this thesis. One stressed Project Manager, (see chapter 5), seeking to distance himself from staff who he defensively constructs as “not up to the job”, would not be enough on its own to bring these poor outcomes into being. One linear program logic model (see chapter 6) will not determine a poor outcome, in a project environment in which it is safe to actively engage, question, explore, offer ideas around possible connections of project activities and project outcomes, and perhaps even change the logic model, as individuals bring their own authority and insights to flesh out relevant elements of complexity. One demanding Senior Executive¹ (whose championing of evaluation I describe in chapter 7) expecting only to hear ‘good news stories’ from projects may not be enough to make those below him collude with his demands. It is only when there are weaknesses at all three levels, and these weaknesses line up in a similar way to holes in Swiss cheese might line up, that the most perverse outcomes occur.

The scope of the thesis is broad, reflecting my desire to map for further research, some of the territory of internal, mandatory evaluation, particularly given the relative newness of the field of applied research in evaluation practice in Australia, and within my University, and the emerging literature on an evolving research agenda for evaluation practice internationally (Henry et al, 2003).

¹ I use the phrase senior executive in two ways. The first way, as referred to here, points to the senior executive level of the Department, or the “senior executive” as a group. When I refer in the thesis to the “Senior Executive”, I am referring to a person, an incumbent of the most senior executive position.
1.2 Bridging concepts toward Social Defence theory

To support my thesis that evaluation contributed to distortion and to harming essential worker and client relationships, relationships which were the means for achieving the work tasks, and that it did so by becoming a systemic defence against anxiety, I will next discuss three key ideas which facilitate this discussion. These broad, interrelated ideas are distortion, performativity and perversity. These ideas did not form part of my thinking at the start of the research, but were ideas that retrospectively helped me arrive at my thesis. I see them as bridging ideas, and they are outlined here in this spirit. It was through my experience of these ideas as phenomena during my research, that I was led to an understanding of the wider proposition that evaluation in becoming a systemic defence, was in fact performing an unconscious but powerful function for the Department.

1.2.1 Distortion

I use the word distortion to describe a process, rather than an outcome. An emphasis on process allows for more of a focus on the dynamic elements of distortion. This is necessary, given the fluidity and contingencies of organizational life and the humanity of its actors, including organizational staff, program clients, and the social and political contexts in which they reside. The Latin meaning of torquere, the root of the word distortion, is to twist (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 2002). The twist can vary in its strength; it can be consciously or unconsciously applied or effected by different sorts of relational interactions.

There were multiple sources of the distortions experienced in the case study. They included aspects of the organizational milieux fashioned by certain prevailing political, societal and commercial norms, attitudes, values and histories that impinged on the case study environment. They also included particular stressors arising from the interaction of project staff, clients and departmental leaders. Other sources of distortion included the evaluation approaches and the accountability rationales. Pervading all these tensions was a palpable dimension of anxiety. All these factors contributed to a distortion both of a picture of the life of the project, and to the relationships on which the project’s development was based.

Ball (2003) holds that fabrications are versions of an organizational account of itself, which are not outside the truth, but neither do they render true or direct accounts. They are produced purposefully and generally these versions are in order to demonstrate accountability.
Truthfulness is not the point…They [fabrications] are ways of presenting oneself within particular registers of meaning, within a particular economy of meaning in which only certain possibilities of being have value… They are a betrayal…a giving up of claims to authenticity and commitment, an investment in plasticity (p. 225).

In this project, the distortion became symbolically represented by an artefact – a Final Project Report, in the production of which I was complicit. This report was a ‘fabrication’, in the sense of the word as used by Ball (2003).

Ball (2003) could have been looking over our shoulder during the painful processes of writing the ‘official story’, the Final Project Report of the project, or over the shoulders of the two graphic designers who took on the work to render the gloss to the report after we had arrived at a final version of the text. Ball refers to the acts of fabrication as rendering the organization into a recognisable rationality which is underpinned by “robust procedures”, punctuated by “best practice” and always “improving”, always looking for “what works” (p. 225). Ball sees glossy publications as only one of the most obvious forms of fabrication, arguing that fabrications are also part of day to day social relations and practices. Fabrication comes at a cost. There is a cost to project staff, whose issues are avoided in the fabrication, and to others who potentially could have learned from a more open discussion of the issues encountered in the project, and other costs arising from the project management’s actions to construct the work environment in such a manner as to minimise the likelihood of the emergence of overt conflict. I document in this thesis my personal cost – that of loss of authenticity. While I experienced distortion well before I understood it conceptually, I have since discovered a range of literature from different fields which addresses the phenomenon as it relates to the ways in which organizations shape, and are shaped by, what I now see as performative demands which require its senior employees to exert a particular control over the way in which its processes are carried out and accounted for (Fielding, 2000; Cummins, 2002; du Gay, 1997; Cheney, 1983; Sinclair, 2001; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elliot, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 2003; Gregory, 1995; Kenny, 2002; Mumby, 1987; Sennett, 1998; Weaver et al, 1999; Monbiot, 2002).

1.2.2 Performativity

Closely linked to the idea of fabrication is that of performativity. Lyotard first coined the word “performativity” to describe a way of being, a type of performance, which uses economic ends as its main yardstick (Lyotard, 1984). Lyotard sought to show how knowledge and learning are regarded and shaped by an economic and social system. He argued that in seeking to optimize efficiency and effectiveness of knowledge and learning, we construct an “equation between
wealth, efficiency, and truth” (p.37). Edwards and Usher (2001), in developing Lyotard’s ideas, locate performativity “within wider discursive practices of economic globalization, neoliberal economics, and market competitiveness” (p.8). There are certain sorts of knowledge and skills which are needed to stay ahead in the competitive globalised world markets. Individuals too may need to be shaped in certain ways to contribute to the maintenance of this type of economic world order. Usher and Solomon (1998), writing about the changes wrought in higher education by performativity, hold that the key questions of knowledge are no longer “Is it true?”, or “Does it contribute to human progress?”, but rather, “What use is it?”, and “How will it enhance the performance of people and organizations?”. Amid these pressures the reason for performativity becomes unspoken and unquestioned, and the emphasis on outcomes pushes these basic assumptions of “is it true” and “does it contribute to human progress” further from view, making them difficult to access. Some scholars have noted the way performativity pushes toward closure (Usher and Solomon, 1998; Brew, 2001), an interesting perspective, particularly given the perspective of complexity theorists on the absence of closure in dynamic systems (Sanderson, 2002). The push for closure is often distorting; for when it is enacted, it offers a foreshortened version of reality which further occludes what is really happening.

Ball (2003) uses the concept of performativity as a context for the idea of fabrication, an idea I have outlined above in discussing distortion. In a performative context, professional judgments may be subordinated, we select from versions of the truth and in so doing, we maintain the fabrication, in order to “escape from the gaze” (p.2), a reference to Foucault’s attention to the dominant practices in social organizations in which the power relations necessitate detailed, often hidden forms of coercion (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p.73). Ball says these dynamics are prevalent in work systems. He regards them as a loss, a loss of a kind of liberty.

While some researchers argue that the disturbances which have followed the ‘real world’ of performativity are not all negative (Usher and Solomon, 1998), the evidence from this case study suggests that the consequences of performativity on the program and its evaluation have been predominantly harmful. I argue in the last chapter of the thesis, that other outcomes are possible despite the difficulties encountered in performative organizational environments.

1.2.3 Perversity

Long (2001b) and Fraser (1999; 2001) both use the term ‘perversity’ in relation to current organizational climates. Long, writing from a systems psychodynamic perspective, argues that there is increasing evidence of a perverse state of mind in organizations today. Fraser uses the
term in relation to the organizational policy environments faced by those with evaluation responsibilities, environments where rational aims and outcomes are more in evidence in word than in deed (Fraser, 2001). This reality that rational outcomes are more in evidence in word than in deed typically lies outside the ideology of evaluation.

Stone, writing about approaches to policy, calls the dominant approach to ideology the “rationality project” (Stone, 1988). The rationality project can be seen in policy terms as what Colebatch (1998) calls the “classical” view of policy, the authoritative rational choice model of policy. In this view, there is an emphasis on the production of an ordered, sequenced, objectively definable policy process, based on agreed objectives, constituted by causally related elements. This is the classical view, and is linked to what Stone calls the “managerial sophistication… of evaluating and revising implemented solutions” (p.7). The classical view is typically contrasted with what is called in policy texts, the “structured interaction model”, with its focus on the diversity of views on the issue of understanding the problem under scrutiny, the means of addressing the problem, and the multiple perspectives on the sorts of activities which will address the problem (Colebatch, 1998). The emphasis in the interaction model is on negotiation, “responding to challenge, contest and uncertainty” (p.100). The differences between the classical “rationality project”, and the interaction model, are not benign, as Shore and Wright (1997) point out. They argue that the use of objectivity, rationality and neutrality, seen as key elements of the classical view, work to obscure what they see as the essentially political nature of policy.

Kilburg, writing in 1980 for evaluators, suggests that the “rationality project” maintains its dominance through the conceptual management process of a growing emphasis on objectification. I understand Kilburg’s use of the word objectification in the positivist sense, an affirmation of universality of concepts, and the appeal of the idea of the capacity to understand them by the externalizing processes of observation, experimentation and calculation (Macey, 2000, p.303), whereby they are allegedly freed from subjective influences, and even moral judgments. Kilburg argues that evaluation makes a significant and deleterious contribution to this process of objectification. Interestingly, Kilburg’s warning has seldom been cited in evaluation literature.

Fraser’s (2001) idea of perversity is on one level more benign than Long’s (2001). He speaks of it as a “departure from a standard set of assumptions, a standard model, of what the program is supposed to do, how it is supposed to work, and how it is supposed to be designed” (Fraser, 2001, p.22). Yet at another level I think Fraser is moving towards Long’s position, where he refers to an increasing number of situations where actions of government fail to match a simple model of linear rationality, and where he sees that the tools of government, in particular the
reductionist tools of performance management, themselves create an “ever growing number of absurdities” (Fraser, 2001, p.20). Long takes the issues of perversity to the relational level, for their impact on individuals in relationship with others. Fraser holds to the hope that in time, with the right models, we will we able to predict what works and what doesn’t work, while still acknowledging complexity (Fraser, 2001). I value Fraser’s rigorous portrayal of perversity in policy and program objectives, and admire his willingness to offer stringent critique in this competitive world. But he does not however discuss the impact of these processes on the inter-relational domain of work dynamics. In the main, relational issues lie at the heart of much public sector work, particularly at the service delivery level, and to both deny their existence, and harm their operations, deeply challenges how we might authentically continue to work out ways which help us live together, and make progress as a society. It is the dynamics at the relational level which most concern me.

Long (2001) cites a definition of perverse as “persistent in error; different from what is reasonable or required; wayward; peevish; perverted, wicked; against the weight of evidence” (p. 12). She says that the perverse position is one of denial of reality (viz, against the weight of evidence), “denial of a reality that has been and continues to be encountered”. That is, the perverse position is indeed “persistent in its error” (p. 12). Long uncovers a perverse state of mind not in terms of health or pathology, but in terms of “the kinds of social relatedness that it gives rise to”, and that perverse organizations might be understood “not so much as ill, as often out of alignment with their legitimate and symbiotic purposes; or out of alignment with a mutually beneficial contract between the people involved.” (Long, 2001, p.12, emphasis added).

It is this distortion of the social relatedness, the misalignment of the social relationships between people as they set about the work tasks, which I draw particular attention to in the thesis. I will show in chapter 3, that the theoretical basis for this perspective on our social interdependence as essentially a relational process lies in Object Relations theory, along with the insights of this theory which emphasise the importance of mutual empathy, our shared vulnerability, our feelings of responsibility for each other. I argue that these important relational tasks are particularly at risk in performative organizational climates, and their undermining leads to the perversity Long (2001) speaks of.

This idea of being out of alignment with a mutually beneficial contract between the people involved, is a useful way for me to talk about the perverse outcomes in an organizational environment, in which the evaluation presence is implicated in the provision of a distortion of a program picture, or story, and collusively avoids the discomfort of naming the tensions, the
differences, the difficulties in program life. Long (2001) says that “much social destructiveness may arise from the contempt, abuse and deceit associated with the perverse” (p.15). I argue that there is a contempt involved in the collusive avoidance of difficulties and engaging in coercion to bring about a documentation of a project in a way which occludes the humanness and relational qualities involved, the work life experiences and the struggle with ambiguous and uncertain activities.

1.2.4 Systemic anxiety in the organizational context

The necessity to distort accounts of projects, the presence of high levels of what I have called performativity, and the destructive aspects of the perversity which results from the impacts on our social relationships which follow from these dynamics, do not in themselves offer an explanation of their prevalence. Theories of Object Relations, which I set out in some detail in chapter 3, gives us a human, grounded, tangible, and compassionate basis from which to begin to try to make sense of the unruly setting in which the case study was based. It provides a way of thinking about both the anxieties we all hold, and how these anxieties can be triggered in certain project environments. It also provides me with a basis for thinking about how a system might set up some more structured protections to better contain these anxieties, given that, as I see them now, it is not idiosyncratic forces which trigger these anxieties, but relatively predictable and prevalent organizational behaviours and processes which make it difficult to keep a firm grip on what is happening. I discuss these containing structures in the last chapter.

The amount of splitting and projection (terms I explain in chapter 3) which occurred within the MI project, was evidence of the presence of systemic anxiety, which increased the emphasis on project outputs, on the intolerance of ambiguity, and on short termism in project planning and delivery. It is in chapter 3 that I ground these ideas in psychodynamic theory, as one approach to illuminating how the project outcomes came to be shaped in the way they were – leading to fabrication, in the performative organizational climate, and leading to perverse, harmful outcomes at the relational level.

1.2.5 Evaluation as a defence against anxiety

Defence against anxiety is proposed as a central purpose of evaluation in this thesis. That evaluation could come to serve this function has been noted in the systems psychodynamic literature. Lieper (1994) gives an account of his evaluation work as an outside consultant to a community mental health facility, in which he refers to the “potential for systems of evaluation
to become yet another part of an organization’s structured defences against the demands and anxieties of the primary task” (p.202). While he makes this claim, the emphasis in his writing is to focus on the processes through which organizations can be supported to learn, and with this emphasis bypasses the central concern of this thesis, which is to provide a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the multiple threads of the formation of such a structured defence. I return to Lieper’s prescriptions in chapter 8, as they align closely to my proposals for ways in which an organization might guard against the use of evaluation as a systemic defence against anxiety.

In evaluation literature, anxiety is generally objectified as a property of those whose performance is evaluated, and advice is given as to how this anxiety can be managed by the evaluator (Donaldsen et al, 2002; Taut and Brauns, 2003; Geva-May and Thorngate, 2003). While this literature has its place, my approach to the concept of anxiety is different in two ways. Firstly, I am arguing that anxiety is an intrapsychic tendency common to all, a tendency which is exacerbated in certain organizational climates, particularly where parties are mutually dependent on each other for work outcomes. This state of mutual dependency is painful, is a source of anxiety, and is often defended against. I provide the conceptual underpinning in Chapter 3, as to why this is so. Secondly, I use the dynamic properties of the concept of anxiety to help understand how evaluation can contribute to the formation of systemic defences which both keep at bay, and then distort, the focus of the inquiry. In this research, anxiety is investigated as a system property, not a personal attribute of those individuals involved in the evaluated project.

Action Science scholars (Friedman, 2000; Argyris, 1993) introduce defense mechanisms as concepts in organizational life, mechanisms which give rise to phenomenon such as “undiscussables”. I suggest another perspective on defense mechanisms in Chapter 3 where I discuss the theoretical ideas (Object Relations theory) which have helped me understand this case, and brought to my attention the theoretical limitations of management literature, including Action Science, which does not attend to the psychodynamic aspects of human learning (Long & Newton, 1997).

I argue that the evaluation presence in the Department both shaped, and was shaped by the Department toward a system of defence against uncertainty, ambiguity and change. While evaluation might have been instead one organizational presence which had the potential to facilitate the creation of an organizational space in which key parties could have conversations, space could not be created during the time in which I observed the organization. Departmental relationships with funders, and other pressures on the Department to maintain a leadership position within evaluation circles, contributed to the suppression of critical discussion.
Evaluation as a practice had become idealized within the Department, and it was difficult to question its practices. It was also difficult for the producers involved in the project to question the project’s practices, as it was for the Advisory Committee to the project to question itself and the Department. The various parties within the project became divided off from each other, in ways which I provide evidence of in future chapters. These divisions were intractable.

There are particular ways in which the evaluation enterprise marries with the dynamics of distortion and performativity. The Department acted in such a way as to project, into its wider context, an image of being in control, with good management practices in place. Evaluation came to form part of these images. In this context, evaluation provided a shield, and operated as a social defence against anxiety. In what ways did evaluative practices bring some distance from the feelings of anxiety and inadequacy? The answers to this question go some way to explaining how the evaluation enterprise became so reified within the Department context. And what were some of the tension points in the wider society which required these sorts of responses from the Department? The model I set out below provides one way to think about these systemic pressures.

1.3 Dynamic Model of Organizational Tensions

1.3.1 Model overview: Tension on two axes

Figure 1 below sets out a model which I will use to orient the reader to how I see the tensions in the intersection of the key ideas in constructing this thesis. I base this outline on a model put forward by Boxer (2004) and it is also informed by Colebatch’s (1998) conceptualization of two axes of perspectives on policy – a vertical axis representing the classical view of policy and the horizontal view as the interactional dimension of policy. Boxer’s model was developed to assist him and his colleagues to understand the dynamics of the UK health system. In developing Boxer’s model which he shaped in the form of a compass, I have labeled the tensions within the North-South axis as “performativ”, and the tensions across the East-West axis, as relational. This visual model provides a way to encapsulate the diversity and complexity which was the result of my gradual understanding of the pressures on an evaluation effort within a public sector agency delivering an agricultural project in a rural context. The model allows me to develop in a meaningful way, the key issues I need the reader to understand in this thesis, issues which taken together make up the thesis claim about the way in which evaluation came to serve this function of a systemic defence against anxiety.
The North-South and East-West axes are taken to represent two key axes of an organization, with the North-South axis representing the administrative axis, and the East-West axis representing the staff group delivering the funded project (in the West) to individual and groups of producers (in the East). Following Boxer (2004), these two axes constitute force fields. The set of forces pulling toward the maintenance of the North South orientation, which I have pooled together to call the performative pressures, are comprised of Departmental, political and societal pressures to do what is said will be done, and the checking of these political and social agreements, in particular the evaluation work required to verify the presence or absence of the meeting of these agreements. The other field, the East-West domain, is made up of the forces which are of an essentially different nature. On this axis are individuals and groups seeking to work together, essentially through personal and work relationships, to achieve certain ends. This is the basis of the labeling of this axis as relational. These two axes reflect fundamentally different approaches to how to think about the business of government in public sector programs, and the ways in which we might consider the evaluation of programs within public sector programs. The performative axis is responding to different sets of pressures, and risks dominating and harming the activities of those operating on the relational axis. In Figure 1 which follows, I put forward the two axes of the compass with their associated tensions along each axis.
Figure 1  Mapping contradictory project tensions onto public sector governance

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<th>N</th>
<th>Dominant Government aspirations, policies and influences</th>
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<td>• Enactment site of government policy</td>
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<td>• Mechanisms for purchase of programs</td>
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<td>• Shift in role of government to enabler</td>
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<th>Department staff delivering project into contested environment</th>
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<td>• Individual consultations with producers</td>
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<td>• Group and on farm education sessions</td>
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<th>Community requirements and risks in engaging with public sector programs</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• Producers attempt to co-create project with Department</td>
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<td>• Producers seek to link laterally to other farmers to self-organise</td>
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<td>• Producers as small, individual businesses with multiple differences</td>
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<th>Dominant Department implementation paradigms</th>
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<td>• Provider of program</td>
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<td>• The “Project” the dominant work form, leading to “projectification”</td>
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<td>• Project Management the dominant management model</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Accountability to purchaser</td>
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<td>• Mandatory evaluation of Departmental programs</td>
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Looking more closely at Figure 1 above, the North compass point represents, in this case study, the ‘government’. This materializes as the zone in which the aspirations of the government in power meet the mechanisms to deliver its projects, being in this case the public sector. The tensions which adhere around this point arise from prevailing policies such as the requirement to enact the ideology of New Public Management (NPM, Meuzelfeldt, 2003) in particular, the reification of economic measures of performance, and also policies which support the role for government as an enabler of service development rather than a direct provider. The thesis draws attention to some of the paradoxes these different “provider/enabler” forces bring about.

The South point of the compass represents “the Department”, a public sector agency which competes with other Departments for funds, and which provides the programs which its representatives in the North point have secured through their negotiations. There is a flow on to the South, from the ideology in the North, in the way programs are managed. There is a heavy use of project management as a tool, and associated technologies in particular in relation to the requirement to deliver on the government’s demand for accountability. I will be describing evaluation is one such technology used in this task of meeting accountability requirements. I refer to this axis here as the dominant North-South dynamic, and as the thesis unfolds, evidence will be provided to affirm the appropriateness of calling this axis the “performative axis”. The North-South axis is dominant, in that it subordinates to its administrative requirements an interpretation of those different processes which may be occurring on the East-West axis.

To the East of the compass model is the recipient of the delivered project. This will typically be members of the public, and in this case, the target group for the project were producers. One dimension of difference between those in the East, compared to those in the North-South administrative axis, is that the inhabitants of the East are not compelled to be involved in the accountability mechanisms which preoccupy the North-South axis. The focus of the North-South axis is increasingly performative, in the meaning set out in the previous section, whereas at the East axis, concerns focus more often on relational tasks and issues. In this case, several of the producers in the East were supportive of the aims of the project, and a smaller group became co-creators with the Department in attempting to bring into being an aspect of the project’s aims. The work on this relational axis was both central to the project, but yet was too hard to account for within the dominant North-South axis. The need to strip the account of the project of the difficult, contentious, and threatening aspects of this work on the East West axis, from the Final Project report, was a critical aspect in the distortion of the project account. It is through means such as these (the use of distortion for example) that the North South performative axis maintains its dominance.
To the West are located the means used by those in the South to deliver the project. Here in the West are located the project staff. While forming part of the interests in the South, to the extent that they “make up” the Department, the project staff operate in the medium between the East and the West, using their presence, and capacities, to relate to the producers as a group of highly differentiated individuals and households, and through the relating which is carried forward within the context of the work relationship, deliver the service, theoretically at least, as conceptualized by the project goals and objectives. The staff when operating at the East-West axis, are relating to the producer in what Boxer calls his “particularity” – the axis allows for an individual, local, contextualised response to the producer. Later in the thesis, I place the demands of the North-South axis, in particular the demand for accountability, against the dynamic which I argue is more likely to be experienced in the East-West axis, that of responsibility – a more person to person responsiveness, based more on what Gregory (1995) calls a felt sense of obligation, something which may be experienced as “a pull in other directions, to a number of significant others” (p.60). These pulls toward others, arise from our primary bonds to each other, and are obscured and submerged in the language and culture of the North-South axis.

I will now briefly outline some key aspects of the dynamics of the model which are important to an understanding of the thesis.

### 1.3.2 How government business dominates

**Dominance of economic paradigms**

The Northern point of the compass houses those measures in which societal progress and achievement are materialized. In our current political paradigm, progress in the modern era is principally defined in material terms, thus giving rise to government emphases on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Eckersley, 2000) as a key economic performance indicator. A key concern then at this compass point is the drive to achieve productivity measures such as GDP, given their status as dominant yardsticks in this paradigm. On a world scale, this might translate as locating sources of labour in countries other than those in which the product is actually produced. Such strategies facilitate demonstrable savings in productivity measures.

However, while there may be an emphasis on economic outcomes measures, this brings ideological concerns in relation to the role of government. One policy area which impacts on the role of government is the National Competition Policy (NCP). Policies such NCP may dictate
that government needs to be very careful if it does get involved in the market economy. Certain principles guide this boundary, such as sanctioning government involvement only in cases of express market failure. There are questions on this North-South axis then of legitimacy and appropriateness of government involvement, as well as effectiveness.

Ambivalence about government involvement

The question of “what is the business of government” understandably preoccupies public sector environments. The current political ideology emphasizes that government must be seen to be able to deliver what it says it will do, while at the same time, increasingly stepping back from the role of ‘provider’, to that of ‘enabler’. The case study in this thesis is replete with Departmental claims that the project was facilitating the producer to ‘take control’ of his environment. The rhetoric in this ideology is one which aims to engender client autonomy. One of the many conundrums here however, is that the resources which are held by government remain within their own control. These resources are required to be accounted for in particular ways, in particular time frames, which have little to do with the ‘life’ on the East-West axis. There is a large and growing literature on the reasons for distrust of this rhetoric (eg, Herbert-Cheshire, 2000). This is sometimes experienced as the tension between “government knows best” – what might be called Nation State programs - and those programs which are more locally enabled interventions. The latter, while perhaps more in keeping with adult learning theory of enabling self discovery, are notoriously risky in the terms of accountability processes with which they are managed, processes which require the account to be rendered in particular ways. It is difficult to account for work done in the terms of the client ‘in his particularity’. The tensions and contradictions in the shifting relationship between the individual and the State were played out in full within the project. Government agencies could not leave it to the community of chosen individuals to shape their own course of action – it needed to be shaped in a particular way; the evaluation presence ultimately assisted with that shaping.

Performativity

The idea of performativity is useful in its capacity to capture the link between the valuing of certain knowledge and skills, typically those closely associated with a productivity performance based outputs and outcomes, which in turn crowd out, or operate at the expense of, the relational processes which form the basis of these “products”, processes which provide the embedded contexts in which the work tasks are achieved. If relational processes are undervalued or dismissed, the means for achieving work tasks are harmed. I see performativity as a particular
trait of the North end of the North-South axis due to its prevalence as a force driving the way in which progress is measured.

The link between rationality and projectification

Another mechanism employed by the North-South administrative axis related to performativity, is the idea of rationality as the dominant basis for certain claims. Rationality is invoked to give the appearance of unity and cohesion, which in turn makes it more difficult for those outside this axis to question this idealized state. In making it less likely that this idealized state can be questioned, rationality somewhat paradoxically furthers the likelihood of the prevalence of illusion. As I explain below, one of the key technologies through which rationality is carried, is what Lundin and Soderholm (1998) refer to as ‘projectification’. This is an aspect more of the South (implementation) end of the North-South axis, as it describes the work form utilized to deliver programs, while also highlighting its functionality as the means through which North acts as the puppeteer holding the project strings. I am using the term projectification to capture some of the way ‘business is done’ in government programs, while acknowledging that the term most likely has its origins in the private sector. Lundin and Soderholm have focused on the work form called project, which they see as broadly defined: “activities that people in general define or think of as projects”, that have economic consequences beyond a single person (they are particularly interested in private sector ‘projects of economic importance’), and are limited in time. Albaek (1996) holds that the concept is equally applicable in the public sector; he gives an account of the increasing use of ‘projects’ as the current ‘form’ of public policy implementation. By projects, Albaek “typically means a cohesive system of general and concrete initiatives that are more delimited in terms of time and target groups”(p.11).

Lundin and Soderholm (1998) hold that projects can be thought about in at least three ways: regular projects in industries believed to be dominated by projects, such as industries and IT Consulting; as regular projects in industries where the use of the project approach is partial, such as a particular phase of product development; and projects as an exceptional effort in organizations (pp.15, 16). My experience in the Department (as well as in other public sector agencies) suggests that this public sector environment is ‘dominated by projects’, and would therefore fit Lundin and Soderholm’s first category of project type.

Using ideas from population ecology and institutional theory, Lundin and Soderholm suggest projects have a measure of fit, a mutual adaptation, between the organization which houses the projects, and the environment which is seen to facilitate the formation of projects. In a market
environment, for example, an organization is in competition with other organizations, particularly around the issue of resources. Those projects which have some fit with environmental criteria are retained. To manage the retention of what will fit in the spaces, between the North compass point and the environmental milieu into which the Department performs, requires the operation of a carefully constructed link between this environment and its funders, and the operations of Departmental programs. This link is in part constituted by the “project”, which, with its tight timelines and emphasis on deliverables, gives the semblance of control and predictability. In this sense, the project is a perfect work form for the market state. While a predominant aspect of projects is that they are planned, rational and ordered, Sahlin-Anderson (2002) also points out that they can at the same time be associated with “flexibility, change and adventure” (p.241). The combination of “planned” and “rational” with “changing” and “adventurous” brings the ‘managerial’ and the ‘market’ modes of service delivery closer together. The contours of these two modes of managerial and market, will become clearer as the case unfolds. It may be that this combination of traits, the “planned, rational and ordered”, with the “flexibility, change and adventure”, might be one area where the public sector, particularly a bureaucratically organized public sector, differs from the private sector, from which this projectification literature is principally drawing. These risky traits of flexibility, change and adventure which characterized the bold project which forms the backdrop for this case study, were ultimately too hard to contain, and needed to be de-emphasised, harming the relationships which had been formed in the process. As Fletcher (1998) would phrase it, these relational processes are “disappeared”, in the high turnover, short time frames of the constant cycle of projects.

These truncated organizational processes diminish the capacity of individuals to engage with their sense of relational responsibility to those they see themselves as serving, in much the same way as Menzies (1959/1988) found nurses were thwarted in their caring role by the way their work role was structured, which splintered the role across the task of caring for a number of patients. In some ways, those with full time work within the Department could be seen as the tip of the iceberg, with those under this tip representing the increasing trend in the delivery of services toward the casualization of the workforce (Sheehan & Tegart, 1998, cited in Alston, 2002, p.215). The fractured work environment minimizes the likelihood of concerted action by staff or clients to change this experience, thereby strengthening the arbitrary power of the North-South axis. It also facilitates the perverse tendency for the North-South axis to skew outcome measures to short term outcomes, perverse in its diversion of interest to short term “fixes”.

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2 Menzies’ work has been published in several locations, and in her later work, she is known as Menzies Lyth. For the sake of consistency, in using Menzies’ 1959 “classic nursing paper”, from this point on I will cite this work as it was re-presented in a 1988 compilation of her work.
argue that these solutions come at the cost to the relationships and trust that are essential for engagement with work tasks on the East-West axis. The loss of capacity through diminishing the quality of relationships and trust brings about the perversity discussed above – the engendering of a social relatedness “which is out of alignment with a mutually beneficial contract with the people involved” (Long, 2001, p.12).

New Public Management (NPM)

I have referred above to the way in which rationality is carried and maintained as a dominant North-South axis through the idea of projectification. A related vehicle for rationality is New Public Management (NPM), which Muezelfeldt (2003) describes as a cluster of organizational forms which are seen to be based on market rationality, including corporatisation, publicly owned service agencies with partially autonomous budgets, government business enterprises, outsourcing of service delivery to private or non-government organisations, and privatization. I will set out below in Figure 2 some characteristics of New Public Management based on Boston (1996), for their relevance to the context of this thesis.

**Figure 2  Characteristics of New Public Management**

| a. | a belief that, at least from the standpoint of management, the differences between the public and private sectors are not generally significant; hence public and private organisations can, and should, be managed on more or less the same basis; |
| b. | a shift in emphasis from process accountability to accountability for results (e.g. a move away from input controls and bureaucratic procedures, rules, and standards to a greater reliance on quantifiable output (or outcome) measures and performance targets); |
| c. | an emphasis on management rather than policy, in particular a new stress on generic management skills; |
| d. | the devolution of management control coupled with the development of improved reporting, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms; |
| e. | the disaggregation of large bureaucratic structures into quasi-autonomous agencies, in particular separation of commercial from non-commercial functions and policy advice from delivery and regulatory functions; |
| f. | a preference for private ownership, contestable provision, and the contracting out of most publicly funded services; |
| g. | a shift from relational to classical modes of contracting (i.e. from long-term and generally poorly specified contracts to shorter-term and much more tightly specified contracts); |
| h. | the imitation of certain private sector management practices such as the use of short-term labour contracts, the development of strategic plans, corporate plans, performance agreements, and mission statements, the introduction of performance-linked remuneration systems, the development of new management information systems, and a greater concern for corporate image; |
| i. | a preference for monetary incentives rather than non-monetary incentives, such as ethics, ethos and status, and; |
| j. | a stress on cost-cutting, efficiency and cutback management. |
State of transition

Boxer (2004) argues we are presently living through a state of transition in terms of aspects of governance of the public sector, a view which is affirmed by Australian scholars (eg. Considine, 2002). Some scholars describe some of these tensions as variants on the theme of neoliberalism, where government seeks to govern through the choices of individual citizens, rather than through the promotion of societal responsibility and the mutualization of risk. Issues of societal responsibility and mutualization of risk are dynamics which can be seen as issues of ‘civil society’, which in the Compass model, are located on the East-West relational axis.

“Neoliberalism proffers a vision of society in which citizenship is no longer constituted in terms of social obligation and collectivised risk but through the individualized capacity to conduct oneself in an entrepreneurial manner” (Higgins and Lockie, 2001, citing Rose, 1999, p. 139).

Multiple tensions exist here. There is the need for government to govern, and to be seen to be governing appropriately, giving rise to the requirement for accountability mechanisms to demonstrate success, a requirement which gives rise to performativity as a dynamic on the North South axis. Existing alongside there pressures are the different processes and outcomes which might follow from a policy strategy of focusing on individualized capacity, individualized along the East-West axis, rather than a mutual/relational capacity, a strategy which might strengthen the social bonds existing between staff and community members along the East-West axis.

Given these tensions, Boxer (2004) argues that one of the tendencies in the Market state is to “evacuate the public realm” (p.33). The public realm can be seen to be located along the East-West relational axis.

The experience within this case study was that the North-South axis, to maintain its dominance, displayed a propensity to subordinate the requirements of staff and community to its administrative requirements. This posed major ethical concerns for the evaluation effort, and this research. I give reasons for these ethical concerns in chapter 4. What mechanisms were used to achieve this dominance?

The tensions causing the North-South axis to act in certain ways, which in this case acted against the interests of the clients in the East-West axis, are a key issue which this thesis seeks to explicate. The thesis also suggests the dilemma will not be quickly solved, as some of the demands of the North-South axis constitute what Hoggett (2005) refers to as the unwinnable position for the public servant wishing to act in the ‘public interest’, but who finds that in many cases public interest demands are conflicting (Monbiot, 2002). Mouffe holds that the best resolution of conflicting interests “can only be partial and provisional” (Mouffe, 1993, p.113).
Throughout the thesis I return to this Compass model, as a means by which to house, describe, and explicate some of the competing tensions within the case study. The model facilitates the conceptualizing of the dominant North-South axis as in part operating as a systemic defence against anxiety in its avoidance of engaging with the diversity, conflict, and interdependency present within its environment. These defences are both strengthened by, and in part caused by, the drive for public sector to be more market oriented, while still representing the state, and yet in reality not being free to act as markets can. It is on the East-West axis where the diversity, and interdependency must be faced, as this is where the implementation work of programs, where people come together to do the actual work, is engaged in, and experienced. This is the axis on the continuum of which staff are likely to feel some sense of responsibility to the program clients they are serving.

1.4 Location of initial research interests

My initial research interests could be seen to be situated in the East-West relational axis, in my desire to attempt to work with practitioners trying to deliver a difficult project to individual producers, and to assist in the understanding of producers’ responses to the project, so that the project could be modified as required. However, as I can now see more clearly with the benefit of hindsight, the organization came to place me more as part of the performative axis. The dilemmas and distortions that this gave rise to provide the story of this thesis.

The threads I sought to weave together in my initial orientation to the research were those of “practice research”, and “internal evaluation”, particularly formative evaluation, of the “illuminative ” kind (Parlett & Hamilton, 1977). I will comment next on the idea of “practice research”.

While the boundaries of what makes up practice research are somewhat fuzzy, it can be broadly understood as “research carried out by practitioners for the purpose of advancing their own practice” (McLeod, 1999, p. 8). Among the more frequently advanced arguments for practice research as expressed in social work are the sense of a professional obligation to be self-evaluating, and the belief that research and practice draw on similar skills (Shaw, 1996).

The starting point… is a twofold belief that practitioners should be encouraged to engage in the evaluation of their own practice and that they possess many of the skills which are necessary to undertake the evaluative task (McIvor, 1995, p. 210).
The researcher and practitioner roles can be either combined, where the practitioner for the purposes of the study she is undertaking becomes the researcher, or developed in tandem, where the researcher acts as consultant, or works as a partner with the researcher. Smith and Corse (1986), writing about the practice of consultancy, argue for the value of involving practitioners in research (p.261).

I had been attracted to the work of Parlett and Hamilton (1977) when I had done the Graduate Diploma in evaluation, particularly their use of what they called “illuminative evaluation”. In the way it was developed by Parlett and Hamilton, writing from an educational context, illuminative evaluation stood unambiguously within the

alternative anthropological paradigm….The aims …are to study the innovatory programme: how it operates, how it is influenced by the various school situations in which it is applied; what those directly concerned regard as its advantages and disadvantages; and how students’ intellectual tasks and academic experiences are most affected. It aims to discover and document what it is like to be participating in the scheme, whether as teacher or pupil; and, in addition, to discern and discuss the innovations most significant features, recurring concomitants, and critical processes (p.10).

One of the common properties which practice research shares with internal evaluation is that practice research is typically seen as insider research, as it is carried out by those actually delivering the service, or in close association with them. The appeal of practitioner based research is well argued by Epstein (2001), who holds that practice research is

more naturalistic, heuristic, and/or reflective in that it is done in natural settings, where it seeks to provide practitioners with a greater understanding of their own practice through strategies of inquiry that integrate practice and research requirements (p.18).

Practice research also appeals to me because it is typically unobtrusive, the involvement of the practitioner is typically voluntary, by which I mean his involvement is not mandatory, and the practitioner is central to the development or emergence of the meaning made of the data, and the application of this meaning to that setting (Kellehear, 1993; Schon, 1983; Fook, 1996; Pinsky et al, 1997; Cheetham, 1997).
While I had hoped to be able to make a partnership with program staff which reflected a collaborative approach between researcher and program staff, this particular perspective on collaboration is not a dominant one in evaluation literature. Schwandt (2005) has drawn attention to what he describes as the strong tendency amongst evaluators toward so-called evidence-based approaches to social practices, and to view those who engage in social practices (in delivering programs, for example) as in need of repair by evaluation (and research). These approaches put evidence first, then focus on practice. Schwandt argues that this should be reversed, and in so doing, take note of the importance of integrating evidence with clinical judgment, and the values of the service recipient.

I had hoped, in my initial framing of the practice research interface with evaluation practice, to engage in a theory-building approach to practice, in circumstances where local staff, local conditions and local circumstances would necessitate the development of an incremental approach to theory building. The theory-building I found myself engaged in, proved to have a very different focus. I found I needed to direct my research attention toward the dynamics in the system which gave rise to the defensive role required of the evaluation function.

1.5 Evaluation forms within the literature

Evaluation forms can be seen in multiple ways. Two perspectives I will comment on here are the “internal” “external” perspective, and the “formative” and “summative” perspective. The evaluation form taken within the Department in which the case study took place, could be best described as a model of “internal evaluation”, in that the evaluation model developed by the Department (discussed in the following chapter) provided for the management of evaluation to be carried out under the authority of Departmental program managers.

In addition to the question of who carries out the evaluation work, insiders or outsiders, are questions of process and focus of the evaluation activity. Formative evaluation is a descriptor sometimes used for the sort of iterative evaluative process carried out as the project unfolds. Summative is often used to describe evaluation approaches which concentrate on an appraisal of the completed program. There are many examples in the literature of the use of these descriptors, their functionality and dysfunctionality, and their overlap (Bloom et al, 1971; Scriven, 1991; Patton, 1994).

As with many efforts to categorise, while categorization is often necessary to simplify concepts for the purpose of explication, when these categories are exposed to the less orderly world which
makes up the complexity of organizational dynamics, they are pulled in different directions by
different forces. While the particular project I was involved in evaluating leant itself to a
formative, ongoing, cyclical evaluation at the project level, the organizational requirements for
information about its programs skewed the orientation of the evaluation task more toward what
would normally be seen as a product of summative evaluation. That organizational requirements
skew evaluation efforts has been the subject of scholarship within both the formative and
summative evaluation literatures (eg, House, 1997, p.46; Weiss, 1972, p.38; Palumbo and
Nachmias, 1983; Palumbo, 1987). However, it is interesting to note the paradox that the greatest
volume of evaluation literature arises from the field of external evaluation, while the largest
volume of evaluation practice is internal (Patton, 1997; Sonnichsen, 2000). Love (1991) is more
specific; he holds that internal evaluations would constitute approximately three quarters of all
evaluation activities in North America (p.2).

The literature suggests several reasons for the inverse relationships between internal evaluation
practice being enacted, and that being published. These reasons give insight, indirectly, into
some of the reasons the North-South administrative axis retains its dominance. Such reasons
include:

- Fear of reprisals from criticizing colleagues (Weiss, 1972, p.38; Leitner and Stupak,
  2000)
- Implications for careers of program staff and organization’s chances of ongoing funding
  (Owen with Rogers, 1999, p.140;)
- Pressure on the evaluator to become an organizational public relations tool (Cummins,
  2002; Ball, 2003; Fielding, 2000)
- Lack of incentives for employees in organizations to publish. Sonnichsen holds that what
  has been written has come mostly from academics studying organizations, consultants
  working in internal evaluation environments, and internal evaluators attending graduate
  school (Sonnichsen, 2000, p.64).
- Growing fears of government privacy and security strictures (Leitner and Stupak, 2000)
- Fear of methodological attacks from academics and other policy ideologues who are seen
  by practitioners as too willing to ‘put down’ the more reportorial and first-person
  accounts (Leitner and Stupak, 2000; Smyth and Holian, 1999)

Dahler-Larsen (2002) has commented on the residue of shame experienced by some evaluators,
particularly in circumstances where the evaluation has been overtaken as an organizational
function. The processes which lead to how the evaluation becomes an organizational function,
with the consequent feelings of shame, form a major part of this thesis. Internal evaluation is a

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difficult terrain to work in, and has the potential to leave the evaluator with such feelings of failure and shame. This was so in my case.

Another reason for the gap between some of the prominent literature on evaluation, and the reality of organizational experience of evaluation, is created by an overemphasis on what I am calling the ‘power of the rational paradigm.’ As this is a theme I develop more fully in the thesis, I will introduce it only in broad terms here.

To my own detriment, I was not mindful enough of the ‘rational’ roots of program evaluation. I see now more clearly the attraction of the ‘rational’ roots of evaluation to its compatibility with being an attractive ally as an organizational function. In becoming such an ally, evaluation makes a major contribution to the dominance of the North-South axis. I will develop this argument shortly – here I will just briefly outline some of the historical links between evaluation practice and ‘rationality’.

Albaek (1996) holds that the typical way in which the ‘rational use’ of evaluation is cast, is as a “rational activity intended to facilitate the conscious improvement of effectiveness and efficiency” (p.22). This conscious improvement of effectiveness and efficiency can also be cast as an organizational capacity to demonstrate accountability, a key force in the North-South axis.

Meyer and Rowan (1991) refer to the public demand for accountability as one of the reasons for growth of evaluation studies. Patton (1997) notes the idea of reinventing government as a key reason for evaluation, and House (1993) has drawn attention to evaluation as one of the key ways of legitimising government in modern capitalistic societies (p.32). Kushner (2000) speaks directly to the East-West axis concerns when he adopts a more critical perspective about the liaison between government and evaluation, and holds that the close relationship with government requires a methodology which necessarily privileges one view of the world over another – usually selecting the view of program administrators, funding bodies and other powerful actors (such as are found in the North-South administrative axis) over that of the individuals who participate in programs, who typically inhabit the East-West axis of the Compass model.

A related implication of the predominance of rationality and its interconnectedness to the issue of anxiety, is apparent in the subtle narrowing of the state role in the provision of welfare services. Hough (1994; 2003) describes the state role as narrowing to more tightly focused protective interventions in the child welfare field. He holds that one of the results of this
reengineering is the ability to and in fact the necessity to codify and evaluate. Hoggett (2003), Parton (1998) and Hough (2003) all refer to the coalescing of societal tension and anxiety contributing to the shaping of these practices, and their evaluation.

There are of course scholars represented in the evaluation literature for whom the initial presumption of the world is the opposite to the rational paradigm set out above, who start from the basis that the world is both complex and contested. Guba and Lincoln (1987) have made a strong contribution to the evaluation field from this paradigm. Weiss (1991) has often in her writing emphasized the two competing world views, commenting that evaluation is a rational enterprise that takes place in a political context.

Greene (2002a) offers a more contested perspective on evaluation practice where she uses the phrase ‘public craft’ as a model for the evaluation practitioner as a manager of the public space, a perspective which links closely to the views of scholars such as House and Howe (1999) and Hanberger (2003), who argue for an evaluation practice which strengthens democracy. In the light of the Compass model put forward in this thesis, I interpret these proposals as encouraging evaluation practitioners to examine the link between the powerful demands of the North-South administrative axis, and the issues of ‘civil society’ which are experienced more fully in the East-West axis, where individuals and groups in society are located, with their various strengths, needs and demands. However, there are serious hurdles to be overcome to link more client based aspirations arising from the East-West axis, particularly where evaluation practice forms part of an ‘organizational function’, which was the case in this research. The difficulty of accounting for the variability, conflict, ambiguity and uncertainty which characterizes the East-West axis evokes Eliot’s (1925) phrase, that

\[
\text{Between the idea} \\
\text{And the reality....} \\
\text{Falls the Shadow.}
\]

Plans and processes which were to be the nub of developments in the East-West axis in the MI project, caused considerable difficulty, in their implementation and representation in reporting, for the performative North-South axis. The plans were built on the circumstances of community, producer, small enterprise issues; they were difficult to portray in their complexity, and needed to be expunged from the performative bureaucratic account. This dissonance had implications for ongoing relationships between producers on the East-West axis. In terms of evaluation as a
public craft, in this case example, the multiple perspectives of stakeholders could neither be aired, much less noted, thus arguably the democratic processes which Greene (2002a) and others refer to, were weakened.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

I will complete this chapter by providing an outline of the structure of the thesis, beginning with a brief summary of this chapter.

This introductory chapter began with an overview of the thesis – the thesis being that evaluation practice in a performative organizational climate may serve as a systemic social defence against anxiety, and in so doing, contributes to a distorted picture of program reality, and does harm to the work relationships through which the work tasks are performed. I argue that the topic is important, given the proliferation of evaluation both across the world, and particularly in public sector environments. I link this with the parallel drive of NPM and its claims to demonstrate accountability. In this Chapter I have introduced the Compass model as a guiding framework for the issues which are to be introduced in the body of the thesis.

To follow, in chapter 2, I describe the public sector organizational context in which I sought to pursue my research interests. This organization had a strong reputation for its leadership in public sector evaluation practice. I introduce here the rationale for evaluation as set out by this Department, and describe a project within this Department in which I took up a role of evaluation coordinator. I refer to this project as the Market Initiatives (MI) project, and provide enough detail of the project to enhance the discussion of the case in subsequent chapters. I explain in some detail in Chapter 4 why I have not named the actual Department in question, or the product group in which the Market Initiatives project was implemented. I refer to the program participants as producers. Because some of the literature I have referred to identifies the Department, I am submitting two reference lists to the examiners. The list which contains references which identify the Department I refer to as “suppressed citations” and is placed in the body of the thesis after the main reference list. Where these citations occur in the thesis they are named “SC”, that is, “suppressed citation” and numbered – SC 1, SC 2 etc.

In chapter 3 I set out the main theory which has assisted my understanding of the case study. The argument for the idea of a social defence against anxiety has two parallel elements to it. One is the set of elements which goes to explain the basis of our intra and intersubjective responses to anxiety. The early work arises from original clinical work of the Object Relations School, a
group of clinicians who personified the value of linking research and practice through their
detailed observation of infants and parents as the key to understanding infant development. This
time has become the basis for a literature and practice on the relevance of these concepts to
understanding organizational life. This theoretical perspective is brought to bear on the case
detail set out in chapter 5, detail which relies for its basis on the understanding of the tendency of
individuals and groups in certain climates to engage in splitting, blaming and projection of
unwanted and uncomfortable responses onto others as a release for the tensions experienced in
work groups.

Chapter 4, the research journey, is my longest chapter. The length is intentional, and my
motivation explicit, as I wanted to set out the dilemmas I faced which may be of benefit to those
students who may follow me into doctoral work in evaluation practice. Higher degree research is
becoming increasingly linked to industry (Usher & Solomon, 1998) and my own research, and
those of more established scholars (Gustavs & Clegg, 2005) suggests that this will be deeply
problematic for students, given the dominance of the North-South administrative axis in
organizations, and in particular the difficulties in dealing with uncertainty and complexity in
certain organizational climates.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are to be read as interconnected, in relation to building the case for
evaluation serving as a social defence against anxiety. I liken the three domains which
individually, and then taken as a whole, frame the discussion and provide the evidence for the
thesis, to the image of layers of Swiss cheese, borrowing an image from error chain analysis
studies, where each domain experiences its own particular pressures and vulnerabilities. The
three domains address the project level (chapter 5), the level of the departmental structures and
processes for evaluation (chapter 6), and the senior executive level (chapter 7). The steps in the
case for how evaluation forms a systemic defence, and the relationship of this argument to the
day to day operations at the project level are complex. These steps include the avoidance of
confrontation, as one human response which aims to keep anxiety at bay. If issues are avoided,
they are not available for consideration. One of the many implications of excluding issues in this
way, is that they then cannot be named. If they cannot be named, they lie outside the purview of
the internal evaluation process, thus pretence is maintained. However, given that evaluation is a
mandatory activity in this Department, this creates irreconcilable and ongoing tensions. For
example, in evaluative reports, the only version of reality that can be recorded is that version
seen to be of the most benefit to the dominant interests of the North-South administrative axis.
While evaluation practice was not directly implicated in the suppression of tension and thus the maintenance of the defence at the project level (in day to day operational terms) the way that it was in subsequent actions in the distorted recording of project activity, in order to create the complex and holistic picture, which is the strength of this thesis, I need to develop my argument by starting at the project level detail, since it was at this level that the damage to work relationships of harmful project and evaluation processes was most pronounced. This is the domain of the East-West axis, where interpersonal relationships between service providers and clients exist, where feelings of ‘responsibility’ between the parties are most pronounced, between staff and producers, and producers to each other.

It is also at this project level that the ordinary presence of anxiety leads to an experience of parties being divided against each other, and it is the operation of these splitting processes which puts the presence of evaluation on a real precipice. The chapter on the project context develops the picture of a number of contradictory and uncertain factors which trigger defensive responses, each of which made the evaluation task of trying to portray some sense of overall balance, or even a portrayal of a partial reality, impossible.

Chapter 6 sets out further elements of the organizational environment which skew the evaluation presence. Here I examine how saturated evaluation has become with the requirements of the market state. In an effort to focus on ‘higher order outcomes’, the information systems sought after by higher levels of organizational hierarchy became coupled with and fed by the evaluation technologies, which in a perverse way, acted to sever the connections with and awareness of the issues at the level of project activity. One of the implications of these processes is a further minimizing of the relational activities which are the substance of the East-West axis interactions. Severing these connections, and with it the awareness of relational issues, are among some of the dynamics of the dominant North-South administrative axis which I describe. The severing dynamics which form part of the North-South performative axis also then serve as part of the defence against confronting the reality at the project level. There is a growing literature in evaluation which is calling to question the production of abstracted and decontextualised outcome data (Perrin, 2003; Spilka, 2003), but there seems to be no lessening of the calls to pursue them more vigorously.

The ultimate incommensurability of the key elements of the Departmental evaluation framework – to both contribute to learning and to contribute to accountability - were resolved in favour of the North-South accountability agenda. Some of the subtle processes through which evaluation assisted with this transition are outlined in chapter 6.
Chapter 7 shows the organizational benefits of evaluation processes, which are seen as proxy measures of accountability. This chapter sets out the case for evaluation as put by the Senior Executive of the Department, and most clearly shows the now quite prominent coupling between the evaluation presence and the Department’s requirement for symbols of accountability – a fusing of the evaluation presence with the dominant North-South administrative axis. I say ‘symbols’, because I introduce in this chapter some of the growing literature which is pointing to the problems with accountability mechanisms, problems which were hoped to be resolved at least in part by the Department by its championing of evaluation. I discuss the need to reorient the accountability rhetoric in a different direction, toward the possibility that a “responsibility” discourse may have some potential for a more authentic focus for evaluation effort.

The final chapter of the thesis, chapter 8, puts forward ideas which might guide evaluation practice, ideas which might sustain us in our efforts to attend to the features of the East-West relational axis, but which are gaps in the ideology of the North-South administrative axis. These efforts will certainly expose us to greater anxiety, but this anxiety may facilitate more productive outcomes, rather than serving as a trigger for avoiding these issues, and thus further excluding from thought the key issues which trouble us. This chapter explores how we might “hold steady in the face of such confusion of directions pushing for change” (Boxer, 2004, p.20), and puts forward some ideas which might form the basis of challenging how things really are, rather than how we would like them to be.

I argue in chapter 8 that evaluation should not be mandatory, due to the ill effects of coercive behaviour on individuals within programs. I suggest a revisiting of the moral norm of responsibility, as an antidote to that of accountability, which in Watson’s (2003) terms, has become a “weasel word”, the analogy being that weasels suck the yolk from an egg, leaving the remnants of the egg effectively empty. This idea builds on our ethical commitment to one another, and draws on Object Relations theory as a basis for the relational development which marks the basis of our humanity. I also put forward the notion, intrinsic to the systems psychodynamic theory, of “containment” – what sort of organizational structure might provide the milieu, the ‘learning space’ strong enough to hold the strong projections we are bound to make onto and into each other, as we struggle with finding a way forward in the complex endeavours in which we are engaged? This requires leadership, and an evaluation practitioner, whether internal or external, will not have the authority to create such a space. However, the need for a safe learning space is something an evaluation practitioner can highlight by seeking the involvement of an appropriately authorized person to enable the creation of this space. These
developments may assist in minimizing the distorting effects of organizationally managed internal evaluation practice.
Chapter 2 The Case Study Context

This chapter provides a brief overview of the Department in which I carried out my fieldwork, the Evaluation Unit within this Department which was responsible for developing evaluation as a component of work across the Division, and the particular project in which I coordinated the evaluation work. I describe some key tensions within the project and provide an outline of the key events in the case, which are further elaborated on as vignettes in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

2.1 The key parties to the case study

2.1.1 The Department

The Department within which I carried out my fieldwork is a public sector department in Australia. At the time of the study, its main source of revenue was government appropriations. It employed a large number of staff who were located in city and regional centres. Its stated broad aim fitted the dominant paradigm of strengthening the economy by increasing a wide range of products for export. In this way the Department’s efforts are linked to the overall Prime Ministerial goal of continuing a pattern of 4% growth in GDP through his term of office (Eckersley, 2000). Of course other discourses are present, such as “triple bottom line”, with an emphasis on social and environmental factors as part of the performance equation. It would be reasonable to say however that the Australian economy remains within a mainstream paradigm of neoliberal thinking about the materialist terms in which progress will be measured. The dominance of this thinking in the case study cannot be underestimated.

In the mid 1990’s, the Department moved to what was referred to as the ‘purchaser-provider’ model of management and administration, often referred to as the ‘purchaser provider split’, with the purchaser engaging in strategic planning and funding decisions, and the provider arm managing and delivering projects. These developments were in keeping with New Public Management (NPM) initiatives in public sector agencies (Hood, 1995; Bevir et al, 2003).

The particular project which forms the basis of the case study was initiated and funded by the Department, and involved increasing the export of rural products through the development of a producer based rural enterprise.
2.1.2 The Evaluation Unit

The Departmental documentation in which the “business” case for the presence of evaluation within the Department was argued gave prominence to economic indicators such as ‘return on investment’ in its ‘business case’.

The [Evaluation Unit] was commissioned ….to develop an evaluation capacity amongst …rural… projects, so that projects would be able to provide credible evidence of:

- return on investment (financial, tangible and non-tangible)
- process improvement; and
- meeting the requirements of customers (consumer and investor)

(taken from internal Departmental documentation)

The return on investment is seen to occur due to “improved outcomes through informed decision making”.

The Evaluation Unit of the Department was recognised nationally and internationally. Public markers of this would include prominence in national and international conferences and publications, evaluation awards, and also frequent invitations to speak about their approach to evaluation to other government departments. In addition to the full-time members of the Evaluation Unit, additional resources were available to involve other experts, and to offer evaluation training courses for Departmental staff.

At the time I began my research, all newly funded projects in the Department were expected to have an evaluation component. Evaluation was becoming mandatory. The key approach of the Department’s Evaluation Strategy was to support the project teams to develop their own evaluation capacity. The evaluation work within projects was carried out under the authority of the Project Manager. Project Managers could use their discretion as to how and when to engage external people to undertake components of the evaluation activity. The Evaluation Unit developed an Evaluation Framework for use by projects carrying out their work. A key aspect of the approach to evaluation was to encourage projects to develop their ‘program logic’. The particular ‘program logic’ which gained ascendancy was what I have named “Generic Template Logic” which is discussed in more detail in chapter 6 (See Suppressed Appendix 1 for an outline of the GTL, and Suppressed Appendix 2 for an outline of the Department’s Framework).
2.1.3 The MI project: A brief account

The MI project was part of a Departmental Product Strategy, the aims of which were to boost competitiveness and sustainability of this Product industry. The MI project was a new initiative within this strategy. It had a budget of over $2m, and was demonstrably the largest project within this Product Strategy. It was both innovative and the stakes were high. The staff working on the project were located at various offices across the regions, and all but two were also working on other projects.

One key MI project objective was to build aggregated amounts of product, which are referred to as “consignments”, by seeking from producers a willingness to participate in the project. The way in which producers were to be encouraged to be involved was largely through the invitations to participate issued by project staff (7 effective full time staff) who were employed across those parts of the State in which this product was grown. Producers who wished to participate would agree to sell their product, via an independent agent, and give permission for their product to be put into a consignment, which was then sold by this external service provider direct to overseas processors, bypassing the usual method of selling. The most pronounced and obvious project activity was carried out by project staff and producers, although the Project Manager had a large role to play in the compilation of the consignments, and the location of key processors to participate in the project at the processing end. The project found it difficult to achieve the objective of gaining an adequate number of consignments, that is, volume of product, to meet the demand from processors. Due to this fact, the project shifted direction and formed a loose partnership for the purposes of consignment building with a producer cooperative. Members of the cooperative had business enterprises spanning a significantly large geographic area, and through the cooperative membership the project had access to greater volume of product than staff were able to achieve in their one to one and group approaches to individual producers. Half of the consignments which were successfully exported through the MI project comprised product from this producer cooperative. Even so, two thirds of the consignments built were not delivered, as agreements could not be reached with either parties (producers or processors) regarding price or logistics.

Other project activity included training sessions for producers in the use of technology to test their product at the site of production, the development of software to assist in product testing, and a compilation of a regional profile of the specifications and distribution of this product grown in Australia.
There were two related project objectives which were difficult and became particularly contentious. One objective was to develop, initially through the work of the MI project team, a network of producers interested in selling their product outside of the usual methods of organizing sale of the product. A related objective was to develop a company structure of producers to continue the business relationships between producers and processors set up under the MI project. This was called the Supply Structure company. It was envisaged that those in the network of “individual producers” interested in the concept would be linked at some future time with the development of the Supply Structure company.

The Department distanced itself from this Supply Structure company work when faced with threats that its involvement in the work could be seen as inappropriate for government. The threat appeared to be that Departmental officers could be seen to be acting improperly by giving selective commercial advantage to some members of the public and not others. This distancing was harmful to the development of the company.

Despite these mixed results, the project was reported as an unqualified success in its Final Report (SC 6). The bulk of the content of the Final Report was developed by the Evaluation Working Group, and fashioned by a complex mixture of project management, evaluation technologies, a champion Senior Executive, and the performative environment. I offer detail on the Evaluation Working Group below. The detail on mechanisms of how and why this shaping took place comprises much of this thesis.

The MI project had been funded for a three year period. It did not receive ongoing funding at the end of this period.

The timelines of the case study are set out in Years 1 to 3, with Year 1 being the first year of the MI project, Year 2 being the first year of my association with the MI project and the formal commencement of the Evaluation Working Group, and Year 3 being the third and final year of the MI project. Subsequent years in which further research was carried out in order to arrive at the thesis, are not denoted numerically.

2.1.4 The evaluation of the project

When invited into the MI project my initial assessment of the project was that, as it was an exploratory, emerging, innovative project, it would be a likely project in which to develop a formative evaluation process in conjunction with project staff. I assumed that the learnings could be documented for immediate use in the project, and also for future learning in this field of
agricultural innovation. The success of the MI project was seen by some to be heavily dependent on the reaction it would receive from producers, and monitoring this reaction was agreed on as a key task for both the project and the evaluation process. I entered the project on the understanding that I would use my presence and research focus to develop ideas and approaches with project staff about how their practice with producers in delivering the project could also serve to assist them to document their assessments of their work, thereby creating meaning together in ways and in forms which might then be able to feed into formative evaluation. I discuss the shortcomings of my initial research and evaluation contracting in chapter 4. What occurred incrementally, and in both subtle and not so subtle ways, was that what was required, at the end of the day, was a success-oriented justification of the project. The thesis explores how this came about, and seeks to understand some of the structures and processes which moved the evaluation in this direction. Understanding the need for a justificatory evaluation product, I was to learn about and theorise about barriers to developing understandings at the producer and practitioner level, in their diversity of settings.

My role within the project was that of ‘evaluation coordinator’. Two members of the project team were assigned to work with me.

Among our evaluation activities were:

- Document analysis (reports, minutes of meetings, project correspondence, documents detailing product specifications)
- Interviews (producers, MI Advisory Committee members, service providers, project staff)
- Questionnaires (at producer meetings)
- Observation (of producer meetings, project meetings, Advisory Committee meetings, Supply Structure company meetings)
- Assisting with the setting up of focus groups and phone surveys which were carried out by a Market Research company. I managed the relationship with the Market Research consultant, on behalf of the Project.

Before going on to describe the project which forms the basis of this case study, I will set out below a figure which locates the key parties I will be discussing in the thesis.
2.1.5 The key parties in the case study

Figure 3  Key parties in Case Study
### Figure 4    Elaboration of key parties shown in Figure 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>The Department</strong></th>
<th>A public sector agency delivering programs into regional and rural areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>University at which I was enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><strong>The Senior Executive</strong></td>
<td>The most senior officer discussed in the case study. He is regarded, and regards himself, as an “evaluation champion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>The Portfolio Manager</strong></td>
<td>This person was located on the “purchaser” side of the Department, was not involved in operational matters, but was a key figure in terms of allocating budgets to those projects which were focused on this commodity area – which I call the “product group”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>The Department Evaluation Unit</strong></td>
<td>Full time staff plus budget for additional requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>The MI Advisory Committee</strong></td>
<td>The MI is the project which formed the basis of the case study. The Advisory Committee met monthly, and was composed of members from industry groups, senior Departmental officers, and two producer representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>MI Project</strong></td>
<td>Funded directly from Treasury, the MI project ran over a three year period, and did not attract funds to continue its work. I refer in the body of the thesis to MI project work Years 1 to 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td><strong>Program Leader</strong></td>
<td>The MI project had a Program Leader, the most senior officer in the project. Two different people occupied this position in the course of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td><strong>Project Manager</strong></td>
<td>The MI project manager, appointed from outside the Department, on contract, particularly to manage this project. Prior to this appointment, another Department person had led the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td><strong>Project Team members</strong></td>
<td>The MI project team members. 7 Effective Full time positions, 14 people in number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td><strong>Evaluation Working Group</strong></td>
<td>Two members of the MI project team were appointed to work with me on evaluation. We were known as the Evaluation Working Group (EWG). The EWG started in Year 2 of the MI project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td><strong>Evaluation Coordinator</strong></td>
<td>This was the role I took up, for the MI project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td><strong>Project Clients</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td><strong>Individual producer clients</strong></td>
<td>The individual producers who had expressed an interest in the MI project, who formed part of the MI project data base of producer. Some of these producers sold their product through the MI project, and their product formed part of the consignments which were built and exported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td><strong>The producer cooperative</strong></td>
<td>Those producers who were members of a producer cooperative, with whom the MI project developed a relationship half way through the MI project period to expedite the project’s access to larger supplies of product for consignment building and export.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td><strong>The Supply Structure company</strong></td>
<td>Those producers who responded to an invitation from the Department, to explore the formation of a company, to continue the business relationships which had been set up under the MI project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Overseas processors</strong></td>
<td>Three product processors agreed to work in with the MI project to explore prospects of developing a direct product supply from Australian producers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3 above emphasizes the dominance of the Department, as the widest blue circle. I have drawn the other parties who were external to the project, as overlapping both the Department’s external boundary, and also overlapping in large part the Department’s internal turf. This seemed a more apt representation than showing the Department moving outside its own boundaries and going into the turf of these external bodies. For example, I have drawn the MI Advisory Committee as having to come onto the Department’s territory. This is in part because there were members of that Committee who were also part of the Department, such as the Portfolio Manager, and the Program Leader. But it also symbolizes what became clear as time went on, that the terms, or what one producer called “the lines of engagement”, were determined by the Department. Similarly the project clients. I have drawn them as coming into the Department to participate in the project, and while there, were also overlapping with the Project staff, the Evaluation Working Group and my own role as Evaluation Coordinator. However, when deemed necessary by the Department, aspects of this work, such as the Supply Structure company work, were “extruded” from the inner blue Departmental circle, and “cut adrift” from and by the Department.

2.1.6 Sources of case study data from the organizational context

While the sources of data are set out in full in Chapter 4, particularly at 4.10, they are summarised here. The dominant source of data from the fieldwork period arose from my experience in the role of both coordinator of the evaluation work, and also researcher working alongside the project team members. During this period I was both an active participant and a passive observer of intraorganization and interorganizational processes. In this period I wrote 11 100 page fieldwork notebooks which contained both details of the work carried out within the evaluation coordinator’s role, notes from meetings and conversations, including meetings with broader relevance to public sector evaluation and organizational life. The notebooks also contained my reflections on my evaluation role and research role during the fieldwork and subsequently. Additional data included documentation about the project and its organizational and public sector context, email correspondence, and published material about the organization. In addition I communicated with some project members after the completion of the evaluation, and I also continued to observe and reflectively document Departmental presentations on evaluation throughout the period of my candidature, which extended for four years after my project based fieldwork. Data were also derived directly from that part of my role which was informed by my own
background, identity, and values, and the emotional experiences which were triggered during the fieldwork period. As they formed part of my record keeping, these experiences were also available to me as data in my subsequent reflections on the fieldwork.

2.2. Project images denoting anxiety

The images developed by a graphic artist who consulted to the project were ones which encapsulated a considerable degree of threat. I have placed these images in (suppressed) Appendix 4. Image 1 depicts a threatening representation of the current selling system, showing the producer in imminent danger. The small space between the threatening object and the producer suggests little time is left for the producer to change from this system of selling.

Image 2 shows two groups of people, one on either side of a chasm, with their hands outstretched to each other. The two groups are the producers on one side, and the processors on another. The producer in the lead seems to be being held back by his colleagues, or perhaps just supported while he takes the risk of reaching out. The consequences of failure lead to the bottom of the chasm. The threat inherent in such relational work of developing support with processors is palpable. The Department is conspicuous by its absence in the picture.

2.3 Contested aspects of the MI project

The above description of the MI project does not in the main provide an account which refers to what Schwandt (2003a) might call the “rough ground” of project reality, ground which in performative organizational climates is required to be pasted over. I will briefly set out the main ambiguities and contingencies encountered in the project, which will serve two functions – it will point to their relevance to the task of unbundling the dominant and unproblematized ‘rational’ rhetoric in relation to project goals and plans, and will also serve as a background understanding when I discuss the case in more detail in chapter 5.

The sorts of issues I raise below are faced in many programs, and often undermine the modernist assumption that programs have clear objectives, even if work is required to make them such, that there exist known and knowable causal relationships between the specified program elements, and that these matters can be reported on in similarly logically methodical ways. The following figure lists these tensions which are discussed in more detail below.
### Figure 5 Summary of project tensions

| 2.3.1 | Market development or market failure | In relation to the governing ideology of the State, was the policy situation one where the project was being delivered into a market situation where the market was seen to be working, and therefore government should “stay out”, or was the market situation one of “market failure”, and therefore a case in which the government should become more involved? |
| 2.3.2 | Clear or contested aims? | Was the program better characterized as having clear and unambiguous aims and more mainstream in its business, or were the aims contested? |
| 2.3.3 | Mainstream or exploratory? | Was the project one of a run of ‘mainstream’ projects delivered by the Department, or was it a pilot project of a more exploratory nature, set up to test the likelihood of producers’ willingness to change their practices? |
| 2.3.4 | The slow public service “of old”, or the new entrepreneurial public service? | Was the nature of appropriate governance one where a key informing principle is the professionalism of the public service with its slower processes of checks and balances, or one where the public servant was better off being more entrepreneurial, more flexible, and free to “do deals” as required by the task at hand? |
| 2.3.5 | Whose project funds? | Having acquired the funds, did the project have the flexibility to use its funds as it thought fit, or was it constrained by the decisions of previous senior decision makers even though they were no longer present to take responsibility for the decisions they had taken? |
| 2.3.6 | Whose decision making? | Was the program environment one where the governance decisions in relation to the project could be made by those community members/producers who were involved and whose business the project aimed to improve, or was this a program environment which needed to be and was going to be controlled by the relevant government department? |
| 2.3.7 | Who governs? | Was the project management structure one of maximising local management control, as aspired to in NPM, or was the management structure still predominantly centralist? |
| 2.3.8 | Who benefits | Were the intended beneficiaries of the project the whole industry, or were they those participating producers? |
| 2.3.9 | Evaluation purpose | Was evaluation present in project to assist with incremental improvement and decision making or was it there to write the success story? |

### 2.3.1 Market development or market failure?

A major tension in the context of the MI project, was whether this product industry was experiencing a case of market failure or not? If it was not, what were considered the best approaches to increasing its productivity, and what was the role for government in this?

There are four interrelated issues in this question of market development or market failure. Was it best to try and change the way the product was marketed, changing from the current system, to developing closer supply chain relationships? How was it best to measure the productivity of this industry? Was there a case of market failure in this industry? What should and could government do?
Changing the way the product is sold?

It was often stated that the background rationale to the MI project was that previous government and other industry reports had focused on the deficits in the mechanisms of the supply chain of this particular product industry. The documentation on which the MI project was said to be based was considered confidential, and could not be quoted from or circulated.

While accurate figures were not available, there was general acceptance that approximately 80% of this product was sold nationally through one main selling system. The logic of the MI project was in part built on the view that this system was seen to remove the producer from the market signals sent by purchasers, and that one benefit to moving toward a more direct relationship between producers and processors, which was a key aim of the MI project, was to remove this impediment. However, one of the many threats posed by this change, was that if producers were to move away from their usual way of selling, this brought with it the possibility that producers would also move away from the service industries which supported that selling system, such as the “middle men” who historically had facilitated the sale of their product. This possible threat to the business interests of these intermediaries could never be dealt with openly in the project, but remained an ever-present source of anxiety.

Opinions were divided among agricultural economists and others as to whether the industry could be helped by this means of producers developing closer ties with processors, a central idea in the MI project.

Measurement of productivity.

There were those who thought that changing the way the product is sold would not address the key measure of increasing the productivity of the industry, and that the only way to do this was to increase the amount of production, rather than to emphasise the development of supply chain relationships, in the vain hope, as this group of thinkers saw it, of ultimately improving product prices. There were certainly limits to certainty about the problem definition, as well as the problem treatment. These limits to certainty, I will argue, were also inherently anxiety provoking.

There were other concerns about productivity as a measure. Some economic analyses showed that producers in the product group, when full costs of owning and operating the business were taken into account, 60% were estimated to generate negative returns to assets employed (SC 22, p.25). Debates about what business elements to measure in the ‘productivity equation’ were all
vexed and complex questions, but there was agreement that however you did the sums, this product group was ascribed a low productivity figure in Departmental equations (SC 22). It was this low productivity figure that was spoken of as the reason the group of Departmental projects devoted to this product area was so vulnerable within the Department. This low productivity figure was also seen to be closely associated with the previous large cut in staff and programs in this area. Suffice to say in this introduction to the project context, the MI project entered a contested policy domain.

Another compounding factor in the uncertain equation of productivity was that the industry was a truly global one, thus linking productivity measures to global market trends, trends which were unstable, and essentially in this product area, deteriorating, given the competition from other products. The decline of Australian manufacturing industry further exposed this industry to the vicissitudes of the global economy. One of the three overseas processors which participated in the MI project had to suspend its involvement, due to needing to put off over 600 of its staff, when it faced competition from cheaper labour in developing countries.

Market failure?

A further contested matter was whether it could be said that this industry was experiencing ‘market failure’. This is a complex notion, and one where economists maintain the dominant discourse. Briefly put, the onus of proof is on those who advocate government intervention in any industry to demonstrate the case that the market ‘wasn’t working’. The National Competition Policy seeks to ensure that if government is involved in the market economy, it doesn’t ‘crowd out’ prospective private investment. Before the MI project finished at the end of June, Year 3, the independent Consultant’s review of the Department’s product strategy in this industry group took the view that there was not a case of demonstrable market failure in relation to this product, and the Department had been in error in intervening as it did with the MI project (SC 1).

Appropriate role of Government?

I referred above to images used in the MI project brochures which contained a distinct aura of threat to the producer (Appendix 4). This threat suggested in these images, in a prescient way, in the course of the MI project, also became a threat to the Department. While the independent review had found that the Department (SC 1) was in error in intervening in the way they had in
this product domain, toward the later stages of the project, this threat materialized into something more tangible, which remained hard to define but which was palpable in its presence.

The threat seemed to lie in the vulnerability the Department might experience should questions be raised as to whether it was appropriate to support one particular group of producers when it might be argued that this did not denote fair and equal treatment of all members of the public, particularly if the producer group gained commercial advantage by their involvement in the project. How the Department dealt with this threat, and the impact of this on the evaluation, is discussed in some detail in chapter 5. What is important to note here however is the threat which can be posed by interests outside a project and a Department, threats which influence the way in which internal Department practices are shaped, which may lead, as they did in this case, to obfuscation if the threat is perceived as potentially harmful.

2.3.2 Project aims - clear or contested?

What was the key project task?

Not surprisingly, the Project Manager’s role was frayed by the difficulty in containing the contested issues around the question of what was the project’s key task. Was the key task the delivery to overseas processors of a certain number of product consignments, was it the education of producers about product processing, was it the furthering of research into producer understanding of how to assess and measure the key determinants of their product’s processing strengths, or was it the establishment of a sustainable Supply Structure Company? All these questions were highly relevant to the evaluation of the project.

The Project Manager needed to take his own stance on these ambiguous matters, and in his mind, the key deliverables were “product in containers”, and “on the water” – i.e. on their way overseas – truly being delivered. Getting the product “on the water”, as the Project Manager would phrase it, was more important than getting “bums on seats”, another of his phrases, which was his way of emphasizing the greater importance of getting the product from producers for consignments, over the education function, which was captured in the phrase “bums on seats”. The Program Leader took up the leadership of the education role, effectively stepping in over the Project Manager on this matter.

Another tension relating to the issue of contested aims is the related question of means by which the aims are achieved. It was assumed at the outset of the project, that one of the aims of “product in containers” and “on the water” would be achieved through the work of the staff
group negotiating individually with producers, or with producers in preexisting groups, the detail of how each producer might make a commitment to the project aims with their product. By mid June, Year 2, it was clear that this individual approach was not going to bring forward enough product, and the Project Manager began another relationship with a producer cooperative, where large quantities of product were stored awaiting sale, in order to try and fulfill consignment quotas. This cooperative had its own staff who were responsible for the communication with their “members” on the detail of the MI project.

This development fundamentally altered the means through which the product was sourced. Nearly half of the product consignments which were sent overseas were built through the MI project’s relationship with this cooperative. While no-one considered the partnering with the cooperative an unwise development, (although the Supply Structure group of producers voiced concern that they were not consulted), it was a development which undercut the program logic which held that the MI project staff group were the means through which the product was sourced. The dominant form of program logic, which held as central that project staff brought about project outcomes, made this development with the producer cooperative difficult to represent in project reporting.

Phases in project distortion – changing goal posts

I have referred above to the multiple aims of the MI project, and how, in reporting the project, some of the lesser aims became more pronounced in the reporting, as a way of deflecting attention from the more controversial aspects of the project. Some of these sorts of shifts created tensions between the needs of producers and staff on the East-West axis, and the dominant requirements of the North-South axis, which gave rise to distortion, which itself at times harmed work relationships.

The necessity to shift emphases in accounting for projects was not only a feature of the MI project. It occurred in other projects too. It was in fact part of the “the game” which program administrators played in the performative climate. One of the senior leaders of another project explained to me that project outcomes that were deemed desirable under one regime of governance could change under another. He was concerned with what he referred to as the Department “changing its mind on the goalposts” in his program area. One of the projects he was responsible for was a program to assist producers diversify their marketing strategies (a program closely related to the MI project in its aims). He hoped to be able to show, with the use of market research methods, a particular percentage increase in the number of producers using
“advanced marketing methods”. He was explicit that in reality it was not reasonable to attribute such an increase to the Department intervention alone, if the figures showed that producers were using more ‘advanced marketing methods’ over time, given the number of agents and other providers who were pushing different marketing strategies in the sector (e.g.: e-commerce, futures market, etc). Despite this, he intended to make this claim if this was how the ‘numbers’ came up. His concern was not that his attribution might be too generous (he seemed to accept that this was part of the game one played in this performative climate) but whether it was on this point that he would be asked to demonstrate outcomes, or whether the ‘goalpost’ might be shifted somewhere else.

2.3.3. Project – mainstream or exploratory?

Was the project one of a run of ‘mainstream’ projects delivered by the Department, or was it a pilot project set up to test the likelihood of producers willingness to change their production practices?

Denying the denial

Early on in my association with the MI project, the Project Manager cautioned me not to use the word trial, or pilot, when talking of the project, as these words gave the impression of impermanence - of something more ‘shaky’, with an element of hypothetical about it. Yet during an early brainstorming session held between the Evaluation Working Group and the senior members of the project, in which key project assumptions and aspirations were elicited, one of the statements generated was “to see if the MI concept was a viable basis for direct marketing”. While the concept of a trial might have been present in the minds of the senior project staff, at least at the outset, the use of the words “pilot” or “trial” were discouraged. This discouragement links to Long’s (2001) notion of a perverse state of mind – i.e., the distortion is known yet denied, and the denial is denied. In fact, the Communication Strategy for the project (another Departmental requirement for projects) stated that the agreed message to be conveyed was that “MI is a credible long term program.” This was despite the funding being for a specific and limited period. This was only one of the many contradictory demands facing staff and project clients. In frank moments, the Project Manager said to me on a number of occasions, “two years in any industry is a drop in the ocean.” This thought could not be voiced in the performative, outcomes-focused environment.
2.3.4 The public service – “slow” or entrepreneurial?

Several officers within the Department informed me that the origins of the project lay with a “non mainstream” intervention by an entrepreneurial government minister and a similarly inclined senior bureaucrat. In excess of $2M had been obtained for the MI project. The project was one of only two Departmental projects which reported directly to Treasury, which was regarded by senior officers as a mark of the less usual way in which the funds had been obtained. When our initially somewhat naïve Evaluation Working Group wrote that we intended to provide a “short history of the MI project” as a part of our evaluation report, a senior Departmental officer quipped: “That will require some creative writing”.

A senior public servant told me late in the project period, that some within the Department resented this entrepreneurial process by which the MI project funds were gained, and this resentment in large part caused the “knives to be out” for the MI project. The knives came to pass when the Department sought an “independent” review from a firm of consultants on the Product Strategy (including other projects within this product group as well as the MI project). Their report provided a damning review of the MI project (SC 1).

2.3.5 Distribution of project funds – who decides?

Could the project funds be flexibly used, or were there constraints imposed by the previous senior decision makers who were not longer present?

Two of the producers who were leaders in the field of advanced product marketing techniques participated as members of the MI Advisory Committee. These producers were expected to take up these roles on a voluntary (ie, unpaid) basis. I sighted some documentation which supported the producers’ claim that other industry members on the Advisory Committee were paid. These prior decisions caused resentment from the producers, and hindered project development. Arrangements such as who would be remunerated and how much, were made by senior officers in the Department, no longer holding management roles within this product group of projects. Senior Departmental staff removed themselves from political and administrative pressures of the project such as these, claiming they were not responsible for such past decisions. The Portfolio Manager, for example, when faced with criticisms by the producers who sat on the MI Advisory Committee, that they were the only Committee members not being paid for the time spent on the Committee, told me that his hands were tied, as the agreements reached as to who would be paid on the MI Advisory Committee were agreements made by the previous Government.
The Portfolio Manager saw that his hands were often tied. This was also the reason he gave when I discussed with him the impact on the project of the multiple projects individual MI staff were allocated to, in addition to their duties in the MI project. The fractured appointments were in part a consequence of the multiple differing sources of project funding, with their differing levels of funding and duration of those sources. The Portfolio Manager said that “it was the task of the Program Leaders to resolve the issue of fractional appointments. I have firmly put it in the hands of those people”. This was surprising, because the Portfolio Manager was located on the purchasing side of the Department, and was therefore a major player in funding Departmental programs. Program Leaders, on the other hand, were not located on this “provider” side of the purchaser provider split, which to my way of thinking, somewhat lessened their responsibility for the fractured nature of the funding sources. Responses in which senior members of the Department distanced themselves from such matters were sometimes used as a defence, as a way of an individual separating himself from responsibility for a decision, leaving others effectively to deal with the consequences with no redress.

2.3.6 Project decision makers – producers or Department?

The structure of governance of the program was a central paradox of the MI project. The phrase “producer ownership” was frequently used by senior Departmental officers, and was a key issue for example in the formation of the Supply Structure company. In the first year of its operation, the MI Advisory Committee developed a model of a company structure to form the basis of the producer run company. The Portfolio Manager present during my fieldwork research period was appointed after this “company model” work had been done, and asked the Committee to recommence this work, this time involving producers, with the aim of attaining “producer ownership”. It was at this point that a group of eight key producers were selected from across the regions, with a view to them “owning” what was developed. In reality, resources were controlled by the Department. When I first met one of the members of this group of eight, at a rural conference, the first thing he said to me was that this group of producers knew nothing of the resources of the MI project, how staff were employed, how they were deployed, etc. However, such matters seemed a long way from the mind of the Department, for whom what seemed to become dominant was the performative drive for the company to have formed by the end of the project period, a timeline which may have had meaning in the Departmentally driven time line, in terms of deliverables, but had less meaning to the producers, for whom the task of getting to know and work with other producers who may be interested to participate in the new company, was anticipated to be a difficult one.
2.3.6 Intended beneficiaries – industry or participating producers?

One conceptualization of the Supply Structure company formation is one which has some affinity with the ideas of mutuality - a political philosophy that more can be achieved for a common objective by working together, in a mutual way, than it can be when working in isolation (Mathews, 1999). I saw this as relevant to the Supply Structure company work in two ways. Economically, if the company could have producer members from across a wide geographic area, this would maximize the chance of accessing product in enough volume to satisfy processor requirements. Low volume of product was seen to be one reason other similar producer groups had experienced difficulty in establishing mutual efforts (SC 7; SC 13). From the standpoint of social capital, the work by some of the producers in the Supply Structure group could also have been seen as a community oriented group of producers looking to establish something of benefit to regional businesses in addition to their own. I am aware of the literature that suggests that researchers can overlook the self interest of individuals in ventures constructed as ones of social capital development (Dibden & Cheshire, 2005). However, I observed several examples of behaviours by some of the members of the Supply Structure group which demonstrated a considerable degree of community consciousness. The literature on legitimacy building in small networks (Human and Provan, 2000) suggests the producers involved in the Supply Structure company were correct in their concerns that one of their key tasks was to initiate and maintain relationships with those producers who had professed an interest in the development of the Supply Structure company.

The work of the Supply Structure company then, can be seen as microcosm of the governance issues which meet in the middle of the North-South administrative axis, and the East-West relational axis. The East-West axis processes had more to do with the relationship formations and other both interpersonal and structural aspects of what would need to be in place to make the company a viable entity among enough producers. This case study shows the difficulty of holding both needs together, the needs of the East-West and those of the North-South administrative axis. It highlights the points on which the needs of those on both axes diverged, and draws attention to the “no –win” situation for evaluation located in the North-South axis, which came under particular pressure to report a fabrication, an undertaking in which evaluation played a role. I discuss these tensions further in chapter 5.

In the face of such ambiguities, it was not surprising that fundamental elements of the project were unclear. In the light of the contested nature of aspects of the project, particularly those aspects which questioned the very existence of the project, as to whether this activity was appropriate for government to be involved in, this issue of who the intended beneficiaries were
was anxiety provoking, and when it was possible that the department might be challenged to back up the claims for their presence in this market environment, the responses to this threat brought up defensive behaviour, details of which I give in chapter 5. The fear associated with an adverse interpretation of this work, caused the Department to “cut adrift” from their work with the Supply Structure company, and the company members, a marked severance in relations, thus exposing those in the East-West relational axis to further loss of direction and support. It did not seem possible, in this project at least, to form relationships which bridged the two axes.

2.3.8 Locus of governance – local or centralist?

One of the heralded benefits of New Public Management is the transfer of more local control of projects to its managers, as opposed to a more centralist management structure.

However, this project in some ways demonstrated the reverse of this trend. The Project Manager often complained that new staff were brought into the Project by the Program Leader, the person one rung on the hierarchy above him, without consultation with him. This left the Program Manager able rightly to say he had little actual authority in relation to the project team members, if he could not be involved in their selection into the project. While I did not accept all the Project Manager’s complaints at face value, this complaint was verified to my satisfaction as I was present on one occasion when he met, for the first time one of the team members. According to the Project Manager, there were two other such occasions of new staff being brought into the project in this way without his involvement.

The Project Manager would link these sorts of issues, in his comments to me, to his complaint he did not see himself as the ‘manager’ of the Project staff. He complained to me that he had never been asked by any of the supervisors of the project staff, people who were responsible for the MI staff’s ‘performance appraisal’, for comment on their work in the MI project. It seemed he did not have the authority to match his manager role, which may have contributed to the view of one of the staff members who said of the Project Manager that “he was not a leader – he coordinates consignments”.

2.3.9 Evaluation purpose – illuminative or justificatory?

Evaluation timelines and reporting were subject to change depending on administrative contingencies. In early part of Year 2, with the MI project due to finish at midyear of Year 3, I was advised that the Portfolio Manager needed reports on current projects in this product group
by the end of the third quarter of Year 2, “as he needs to have all projects [to do with this product] in the pipeline by October, then they go up the ladder, for further perusal and final decision.” The reality of the funding environment, and the need to have project reports completed well before the end of actual project timelines, did not fit well with the rationalization that one of the purposes of evaluation was to ‘assist with managerial decision making’ in relation to the projects. But it did fit well with the ongoing need of a project-based organizational environment, required to be ever vigilant about its own needs for survival, and to know where the next amount of funding was coming from, before information could be provided about project performance. This was not a reflection I could make at the time.

The MI project – a half full or half empty glass

Not surprisingly, there were differing perspectives on whether the project had been worthwhile, and what its key achievements were. For some, the project had been a worthwhile initial demonstration of the level of interest producers held in exploring different ways of marketing their product. For others, the fact that the project management (possibly driven by those higher up in the hierarchy) saw the need to sever its relations with the Supply Structure company, thereby lessening the likelihood of its sustainability, was tantamount to a failure, and a waste of resources. For some, the education sessions offered to producers on marketing, were worth the effort. For others, the sessions were only some of many education sessions available to producers, who can access marketing information through multiple channels other than public sector projects.

Taken on their own, each one of the above mentioned environmental constraints (2.3.1-2.3.9) on the life of projects are most likely bearable, by staff, senior officers, and producers, and can be managed on a day to day basis by the individuals in the positions of responsibility in reporting outcomes in this sort of environment. However, when taken in their entirety, and experienced relentlessly as part of an organizational climate that elicits responses which are inauthentic, instrumental, ahistorical and careless toward the centrality of human relationships as the core of the work task, these sorts of tensions and pressures exacerbate our already innate defensive behaviours, both in individuals and within systems. They constitute a large part of what Lawrence calls the “rational madness” which we as humans construct in the organizations we inhabit (Lawrence, 1995). The detail of how this “rational madness” played out in the life of the project, comprise the vignettes set out in chapters 5, 6 and 7.
2.4 Control as strategy

Stacey (1993; 1996) suggests that it is no accident that issues like anxiety remain in the background, somewhat undiscussed and undiscussable, to use Argyris’s term (1993). Given the above analysis of the degree of contestation in the MI project, it is not difficult to imagine that to the Department, these matters were perceived as threatening, and that one response to threat is to try and maintain control and to act defensively, particularly by denying elements of the reality one faces. Figure 6 below captures this understanding by pointing to the emphasis on the technical and rational, to maximize feelings of comfort, when in fact the “real life” is closer to confusion and the threat of disintegration.

Figure 6 Functionality of certainty in the face of confusion

CERTAINTY AND AGREEMENT

Where real life takes place

Where people are most comfortable

3 The author of the graph presented in Figure 6 is unknown. It is based on the work of Stacey (1996), modified by Zimmerman (2001), and further modified by students of the ISM program, RMIT University, Melbourne. The central idea shown here is premised on the human inclination to avoid anxiety, the theoretical explanation of which is further spelt out in chapter 3.
2.5 Summary

At one level, the project might have been straightforward enough. A large injection of funds into the Department (over $2M), a supportive senior government minister, targeting an area around which there was some agreement, which was that alternatives to the current selling system for this product needed to be explored. What had to be achieved was some cooperation from some producers to provide some of their product, enough to build an adequate number of consignments to see how the system might work. This seemed a good place for the carriage of formative evaluation, with a diligent PhD student unencumbered by the usual restrictions of time and availability.

But, as the Compass model suggests, while there were particular tensions in policy environment into which the MI project was being delivered, an overriding pressure was that emanating from the North point of the compass model, the performative pressures of the North-South axis, which drove the requirement for a rendering of the project story to be untarnished with tension and conflict, a representation which House would claim had to be “without blemish” (House, 1975). What was required to be submerged in this rendition, were the relational dimensions of the East-West axis. The dynamics which were triggered in this milieu were difficult to manage. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 develop these tensions in some detail. However, before I can develop these ideas with detail from the case, I need to address two main aspects of the thesis. In chapter 3 which follows, I set out the theory which has helped me understand the case and develop the thesis, and in chapter 4 I provide an account of the research approach, its strengths and its pitfalls.
The beginning of knowledge is the discovery of something we do not understand.
(Frank Herbert, 1920-1986)

Chapter 3 Object Relations Theory

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 I presented a picture of the organizational and social context in which the MI project was implemented, in which the evaluation project was situated, and began to refer to some of the tensions and anxieties which gave rise to defensive behaviours by senior members of Departmental staff and difficulties for the evaluation process. But the canvas on which an understanding of these barriers to evaluation practice could be drawn needed to be broad and strong, and to address system level rather than individual level forces. The systems psychodynamic field was not the first theoretical field explored in my search for a suitable analytic framework.

The literature on Knowledge Management was the conceptual domain I initially explored, particularly because a substantial amount of this literature focussed in its application to understanding innovative and challenging projects. Those scholars in this field who linked ideas of tacit knowledge and innovation, such as Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka, 2000, seemed to address at least some of the ideas we had struggled with in the MI project. While this literature was rich in its complexity and dynamism, it did not point to an understanding of the defenses I had detected operating at a wider organizational level which had posed such a challenge to the evaluation work, and which of necessity then became the focus of my research on evaluation. The work of Stacey (1996) was suggested as a source of ideas on organizational dynamics. It was Stacey’s (1996) work which first alerted me to the ideas of “legitimate” and “shadow” systems in organizations. In an Australian Evaluation Society presentation in 2002 I explored the proposition that if it was the dynamic between the legitimate system and the shadow system which pushes organizations toward the capacity for change, what did this mean for evaluation practice? Could it be that when as evaluators we are authorized only by the legitimate system, we risk suppressing the learning dynamic?

While Stacey’s work became the point of departure from the Knowledge Management literature, I then deepened my understanding of these ideas with a closer reading of Object Relations theory and systems psychodynamics. These produced a plausible and recurringly useful and important understanding of organizational life and the role of evaluation within systems of organization. In this chapter I outline this Object Relations theory and its usefulness in illuminating processes obscured in the project and the evaluation. This theory is used to offer
further insight into the harmful project environment and its impact on the evaluation, which itself then became captured by the dominant administrative axis, and came to serve the organizational purpose as a social defense against anxiety.

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Gaining greater insight into some of the intrapsychic and intersubjective processes, which constitute these defensive patterns, is important. It provides an opportunity to more closely assess the risks for the evaluation presence, which will by necessity have to confront these issues, as evaluation is not a discretionary activity in this, or in many Departments. It assists in a more realistic assessment of the human experience which drives the dominant North-South administrative arm, in enunciating the ways in which evaluation processes can get caught up in these pressures, and in explaining the strong organizational investment in minimizing the potential explosiveness of direct contact with groups of program clients. Object Relations theory offers an explanation for the threat experienced in social relations, for it shows us how our interdependency is also a source of vulnerability. Krantz (1998) argues that the New Order organizational environments we increasingly find ourselves in flatter structures, self managing teams, cross divisional teamwork, we are more openly confronted with the awareness that we need each other in order to move forward in our endeavours. In discussing the work of this Object Relations School, I am drawing on both primary sources (Klein, 1946; 1959, as reprinted in 1988) and secondary sources (including St Clair, 1986; Ogden, 1998; Krantz, 1998; Hirchhorn, 1988; Hoggett, 2003; Clarke, 2001; Layton 2002; Downs & Carr, 2004).

Object Relations theory also provides some insight into the sorts of organizational structures which enhance our capacities to think together and which can serve to decrease the tendency for work tasks to be split up and distorted, and the tendency toward blame. The key idea here is that of containment—a “holding environment”:

the sense that contexts must exist which can sustain the presence of potentially crippling anxieties, intense psychic pain, and disorienting confusion without themselves either confirming these experiences or collapsing in the face of them…[it requires] structures and methods which can contain the primitive anxieties and irrational emotions that are
inevitably stirred when people are able to expose their experiences, link them with others, and be vulnerable enough to learn in public (Krantz, 1998, p.88; p.93).

However, the Object Relations theory is only one account, although there is of course diversity in opinions among its adherents. I believe the concerns and issues I have raised do not depend solely on the validity of the theoretical perspectives offered here. The reader can consider the dynamics which I am drawing attention to as ones which must be understood in order to be able to operate effectively in their midst, while perhaps preferring other explanations. What I think will be a common perspective in the readers’ reactions is that the dynamics described are commonly experienced in organizational settings, and that at their heart, they profoundly influence, indeed impair, our efforts to achieve our ends, and that these efforts have a basis in our relationship with each other. It is in and through relationship that the work is achieved.

This chapter, then, provides a theoretical framework in which the nature of the schisms which characterized the project and Departmental environment can be understood. This theory has helped me understand the difficulties the Department experienced in listening to the client groups, in managing to keep the staff together as a group, and in being driven to represent themselves in certain, positive, and unrealistic ways.

The theory in this chapter also assists in understanding the intensity of the evaluation experience in a project characterized by divisiveness, the parameters of the experience, and some of the key dynamics of the experience. Taken together, the intensity, the parameters and the key dynamics point to the risks for program monitoring and evaluation, that it too can be caught up in, and collude with, systemic forces which can act in ways that have the effect of splitting us off from that which nourishes us, and which provides the mechanism through which the work gets done – our social connectedness through the various roles we occupy in society (Kets de Vries, 1999; Lieper, 1994). Some organizational climates make us more prone to this splitting off of key aspects of ourselves, our thoughts, in ways which make these aspects of our consciousness hard to retrieve and see “in their whole” again (Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; 1990). This thesis describes one such environment and its impacts.

There was only tolerance at the end of the project for an evaluation report which reflected and symbolized the dominant features of the North-South administrative axes, in its incompleteness, its simplification, and its avoidance of complexity and conflict. Fragmentation which was papered over in the Final Report started a lot earlier in the project than when we started to put together the Final Project Report. I will be arguing that the forces driving the fragmentation were
also in part imposed from outside the organization, in terms of dominant societal values, and were carried through into the project and the evaluation. The fragmentation was also within us, when as individuals we responded to both internal dynamics and systemic structures whose function was to preserve us from pain, a situation as human beings we intuitively wish to avoid. This “inside outside” dynamic, the context within a context, is well summed up by Guntrip, who referred to this “inside outside” double environment as:

internal and external, psychic and material, unconscious and deeply rooted in the life of the body, and also conscious and deeply influenced by human relationships and all the pressures of the social culture (Guntrip, 1961, p.351-352 cited by Lawrence, 1999, p.2).

My overriding desire to represent the dynamics as completely, fully and extensively as I could, has driven this thesis, and the desire to deal with “wholes” has meant that the size of the canvas which forms this thesis is large. But I believe the size of the conceptual overview which this has required has allowed me to point to key factors of relevance to the poor outcomes in this evaluation experience. I will commence by setting out the main theoretical orientation in this chapter, and incrementally add to this core theory, as the chapters unfold, other theory which has a synchronicity with the psychodynamic orientation. Each subsequent chapter, in dealing with different parts of the same system, makes up part of this complex picture.

3.2 The sobering reality: Object-Relations theory

It is the British School of Object Relations from which I particularly draw in this thesis. The British School of Object Relations arose from the clinical research and practice environment of the Tavistock Clinic in the UK. There are several key names associated with the Object Relations School. The two I will be making particular reference to in this chapter are Melanie Klein (1946; 1985) and Donald Winnicott (1960a; 1960b; 1963; 1965; 1973). Freud provided a psychic representation of the way a child sees and feels about his parents, and how this relates to the child’s adult capacity for emotion. Klein developed these ideas into a dynamic model of the child and his experience in a relational manner – that is, the nurturing adult interaction in a mutually constituting manner; that is, essentially, in a relational manner. It was others such as Bion (1962, as discussed by Armstrong, 2005) and Winnicott (1973) who took this basic understanding of how the mind experiences bodily and emotional states, and developed these insights, or mental apparatus for thinking thoughts and generating meanings. The centrality of the mind and how it experiences bodily and emotional states is a central tenet in Object Relations theory.
It can be said that the elementary and primitive function of the psyche is continually to misinterpret the sensations and perceptions of reality, in order to save the psyche from the unpleasurable aspects of reality. This it does to maintain an apparently equable relationship with external reality for the purposes of having a pain free existence. The sobering thought is that, for the most part, even civilized human beings are always directing their thinking processes to avoiding the unpleasant aspects of reality (Lawrence, 1999, p.10).

All psychoanalytic theory underpins this ‘sobering reality’, in that it proposes as a starting point a universally shared common heritage of inherent anxiety, and that human beings work to defend themselves against a constant barrage of this anxiety. It is the Object Relations School in particular which provides the basis for the transition from the individual to the more relational aspects of our group and organizational life.

Much of Object Relations theory and knowledge rests in clinical work and latterly with a parallel development in the field of consulting to organizations. A large part of the substance of the theory relies on the strong interplay between conscious and unconscious processes. While the ideas have been formally, scientifically studied since the beginnings of the 1900’s, they are perhaps more recognizable both through our personal experience, our daily observations about life within ourselves and around us, through certain interpretations of history, and are also deeply embedded in our cultural activity, in particular in literature. The theory offers a powerful description and explanation of the corrosiveness of anxiety when we are “over-exposed” to conditions of uncertainty, and operating in an uncontained environment. Part of this corrosion occurs when there is a sustained pressure to turn toward more primitive ways of functioning, examples of which I give in the chapters to follow.

Shuttleworth (1989) provides a valuable insight into Object Relations theory. The particular emphasis of the Object Relations school of psychodynamic theory is on the primacy of relational aspects of human psychic development, and it is the primacy of this relational motivating force, this drive to attach to an “object”, which lays the foundation for intrapsychic, interpersonal and group experiences. For Freud, this relational aspect was secondary to the basic instincts such as hunger, thirst and pleasure. The Object Relations theorists, whose work postdated Freud, emphasized these relational aspects, in “good enough” conditions, which strengthen the capacity of the infant and then the growing child and adult, to know his own mind, to be aware of “complex psychological emotional states in himself and others” (Shuttleworth, 1989, p.25).
Understanding how the conscious and unconscious mind so steadfastly attempts to defend against anxiety, provides the link to the “person in organization”, and to the idea of how a “social defence” can operate within an organization. The section below examines this question.

3.3 Object Relations and the Formation of the Psyche

3.3.1. Introduction

In this discussion, I will first focus on the findings of Object Relations research as it applies to interactions between individuals at the primary group level, and later in the following sections explain the implications for this research at the organizational level.

Klein proposed that the infant experiences both persecutory anxiety, and also the satisfaction of the breast in its nurturing form. As the infant’s only knowledge of another object at this early stage is the mother, the mother becomes the source of both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ experiences, which in infancy are split and kept apart as ‘good’ and ‘bad’. These two urges are conflictual, and psychic energy is required to be invested in repressing them. Layton (2002) recounts one of Freud’s central messages, which was that what is repressed proliferates in the dark, and can manifest itself in some extreme forms of expression.

In this splitting of the “good” and the “bad”, the infant, (or its operating mechanism which can also be thought of as the ego), splits the object – projecting the bad breast “out”, and reintrojecting the good breast. Introjecting refers to the building of a mental structure through a sense of dependencies with significant others. Klein held that the splitting allowed the infant to create a “psychological sanctuary (safe from hostile feelings) within which he can safely feed, to take in safely what he needs from his mother” (Ogden, 1998, p.137). These feelings form the basis of the infant’s feeling about himself, and can form the basis of feelings of trust and loving. The object (of the ‘object relations’) is seen as an internal mental structure that is formed in early development (Ogden, 1998).

One of Klein’s key insights was that the internal good object, the good breast, is a focal point of the ego, but that the threatening aspect of the object, cannot be entirely done away with, as this anxiety provoking threat is also reintrojected. This insight accounts for the view, a view which bears itself out in every day life, that the actual experience of anxiety can seldom be effectively done away with, as this is reintrojected, and remains “the fear of a destructive impulse within”
These internal objects are “linked”, and it is how the individual interprets these linked objects which becomes the basis for later relations with others, including both intimate relationships, and work and other relationships. The relationship between these internalised objects can also be modified by subsequent experience. What is undisputed however is that the anxieties are universally present.

Klein focused more on the innate, “inherited” instinctual anxiety, leaving it to other Object Relations theorists to bring these ideas forward in exploring the more environmentally induced frustrations and anxieties. The theories arising from this idea of an internalised destructive impulse have applications in more obvious clinical situations such as addictive behaviours and, eating disorders, that is, clinical conditions in which the imbalance of the weight of these internal forces is obvious. But these internalised impulses also serve to remind us that such forces are present in all of us, and that part of our socialization is to find ways to manage them, and in organizations, to find ways to contain them, and turn them to productive use.

3.3.2 The stage of ‘preconcern’

The above discussion has drawn attention to two broad states of mind which Klein theorised are present in our infancy, and are denoted by her label of these two states of mind as ‘positions’. She held that these are states of mind between which we fluctuate throughout our adult lives. The fluidity of these states of mind cannot be underestimated. Klein entitled these positions as “paranoid schizoid”, and “depressive”. To emphasis the movement between these states of mind they are sometimes pictured as set out in Figure 7 below.

**Figure 7  Continuum of two states of mind as positions**

Krantz (1998) refers to Klein’s “grim labeling” of these two states of mind (p. 80). Winnicott did not use these labels, and preferred to call the two polarities the stage of “preconcern” and the stage of “concern”. I have chosen to use Winnicott’s terms in this section of the thesis, as they may de-emphasise the clinical diagnostic judgmental feel which Klein’s terms may convey to those not familiar with this literature. But in doing so, I emphasise that “preconcern” in Winnicott’s terms is the same for the purposes of this discussion, as “paranoid schizoid” in Klein’s terms, and “concern” can be read as the “depressive” position. The essential element of
the paranoid schizoid position is the splitting of the world, both internally and externally, into ‘all good’ and ‘all bad’; holding the ‘bad’ impulses is also to hold the feeling that one has the power to attack and destroy. These impulses in the infant need to be projected, in the case of the infant, into the mother. Downs and Carr (2004) make the point that with the use of the term ‘paranoid’, Klein wished to emphasise that a significant aspect of the anxiety in which this state of mind is experienced is its powerfully persecutory nature. The emphasis Klein makes with the word “schizoid”, is derived directly from its Greek origin: the word element of “schiz” being “cleavage”, or “split”. Splitting is understood as a process of dividing feelings into different elements. It is the combined senses of these two words (paranoid with its persecutory overtone, and schizoid with its splitting connotation), which make up the ideas in this position. What I particularly wish to emphasize with these ideas is that these states of mind are dynamic, are interactive with each other, and in certain environments may be propelled more one way than another.

Part of the dynamic function of these psychic processes is to assist the individual to move ahead. In the primitive (paranoid schizoid) stage however, the emphasis is on the self as object – the self is unspoken, and essentially non-reflective. In infancy, in this state of mind, the infant is seen as ruthless. What is not good is denigrated.

These tendencies towards blaming and scapegoating are seen as occurring through a process called projective identification. They are symptomatic of the paranoid schizoid position, in which splitting and fantasy predominate. Clarke (2002) suggests that a useful way of understanding projective identification is to contrast it with the term projection.

Thus for example, projection is a relatively straightforward process in which we attribute our own affective state to others. We may feel anger and perceive some other person as being angry. In other words, we project our feelings onto another. The other person may be blissfully unaware of the process. Projective identification, however, involves expelling the unpalatable parts of the self into some other, forcing them to feel the way we do, or feel how we feel about them (Clarke, 2002, p.180).

Clarke cites Craib (1998) who says “projective identification is a more profound form of projection. Instead of just seeing the feared quality or emotion in the other person, I behave in such a way as to lead the other person to experience that quality in themselves” (Craib, 1998, p.17, cited by Clarke, 2002, p.180). Clarke emphasises that projective identification is a ridding of unpalatable parts of the self into rather than onto someone else (Clarke, 2001, p.6). In this
state of mind, “there is no psychological vantage point from which more than one emotional plane can be taken in” (Ogden, 1998, p.62). In this state, “the ability to engage in interpersonal relations is seriously compromised, and concrete thinking leads to rigidity and lack of creativity” (Segal, 1957, cited by Krantz, 1998, p.80).

### 3.3.3 “Concern”

In Winnicott’s terms, the Kleinian depressive position can also be read as the stage of “concern”. It is the state in which clusters of attitudes or states of mind show a decreased tendency to split good and bad, and hence the possibility of a state of mind which embodies a greater capacity to both differentiate, as well as to perceive whole objects. This state of mind is less prey to the fusion of self and object. This is one of the great strengths of this theory – aspects of the depressive position hold ideas, dynamics and tendencies which are so clearly of critical importance to us as individuals, as members of organizations, and ultimately, as members of communities concerned about the state of the entire planet. The depressive position is that state in which we have some chance of demonstrating a capacity for self-object differentiation. The development of this capacity is associated with the development of subjectivity, the development of the capacity for symbol formation, the capacity to engage in reality testing, the capacity to care for others, an awareness of guilt, and a capacity for reparation. (Hinshelwood 1989, p.144, cited in Clarke, 2001; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.169; Ogden, 1998, p.72). Seeking this state is a life long task. Its meaning is sometimes expressed in the idea of giving something up, such as the loss of the grandiose ideas that can be associated with the idealization of self or others. Another way in which it is thought of arises from the idea that with the bringing together of bad and good objects, that the integration of the self and object can produce an awareness of the separation from the object, which can in turn produce a pining and sadness.

At this end of the spectrum, the capacities of people operating out of the depressive position indicate an experience of being more fully integrated, a mode in which there are fewer obstacles to thinking, and a mode which holds the potential “to collaborate meaningfully out of concerns that extend beyond survival and self protection” (Krantz, 1998, p. 81). While the potential for splitting is always present, there is less of a tendency that these splits will be enacted (the anxiety in the depressive position is more an anxiety about phantasized harm done by the self), and also that, in relation to the external world, the capacity to differentiate is more developed.
Ambivalence

Object Relations theorists see these mind states on a continuum. On the individual level, as the person develops, the tendency to split good and bad lessens, as the fear of ‘bad objects’ diminishes, and as other psychobiological and other developments occur. There are some other noteworthy developments as the psyche matures, which are particularly relevant to the case study, and in particular the practice of evaluation. One development is that the psyche attains the capacity for ambivalence – about how one feels about oneself and others, that as individuals we can have negative aspects to our identity; those we know (or work with) can have similar negative attributes. This can be a particularly difficult state to attain in relation to those we love. Where for an infant and young child there is an adaptive aspect to idealizing loved ones, for the developing child and adult, one of the developmental tasks is to be able to see these persons as whole objects, objects in which parts of their whole are not ideal.

Avoidance

Another less intuitive aspect of the development of the psyche is the implication of avoiding the range of experiences and feelings. Avoidance itself takes away or denies the person the possibility of engaging with those dynamics, which flow from experiences of embarrassment, shame and guilt. Among the positive aspects of that engagement are the reparative tendencies, which we hold as part of our humanity. Indeed, a cornerstone of Klein’s developmental theory is the critical role played by the task of reparation (Hirschhorn, 1988).

At a social level, the tendencies along this psychic continuum, posed by these two states of mind, are open for re-ignition, depending on the degree of threat in the environment. All Object Relations theorists regard the maintenance of the position of some psychic balance as a life-long task. Inherent in the world of whole objects, are ideas that one can face up to the risk of ‘getting close’ to someone, as one can acknowledge that while this ‘closeness’ can be joyful, meaningful, creative, it also brings with it the existential burden, the realization that so too can one be left, ‘abandoned’. Another challenge this closeness brings is that one cannot control others. Ideas inherent in the depressive position state of mind highlight human vulnerability, a necessary but painful part of interrelating with all of one’s capacities. Inherent in these ideas are concurrent ideas of being able to take responsibility for oneself and one’s actions. We will at any one time be a mixture of the characteristics of the depressive position, with its greater capacity to recognise complexity, loss, joy, while maintaining some defences. It is, as with many things in life, a matter of balance.
Implied in the above discussion, is the idea of our dependence on others. Segal (1973, citing Klein 1935, and 1963b) writes of Klein’s powerful insights in her description of the denial of our dependence on others as a “manic defence”. Segal describes the interrelations in this manic defence of denying our dependence on others, by drawing attention to how the denial is reinforced by the unconscious fantasy that one has omnipotent control over the object – where the fantasy is providing some protection from the anxiety of being abandoned by the object. Segal says there is also sometimes in this manic defence against our dependence on others, the idea of contempt. If one can depict the object as worthless, one can be shielded against its loss; one would care less about the loss of a worthless, despised object.

3.3.4 The Holding Environment

The concept of “holding environment” has a particular meaning and function in this discussion of the formation of the psyche. Implicit in the above discussion on Object Relations theory, is the idea that the interactions between the infant and caregiver take place within a context. Winnicott named this primary context the “holding environment” (Winnicott, 1963). This is a central idea, and it is within this environment that the other dynamics interact.

I have already discussed the mechanism of internalisation, where an infant will internalise a mental representation on which it can then draw for comfort, and also protection, where the infant can also externalise (project) wishes and fears. How this development is impeded or facilitated by experiences in the caregiver-infant milieux, in this holding environment, is a key concern of Winnicott’s.

The parameters of this environment are broad. In Winnicott’s terms, they include what we might now recognise as an ecosystems perspective (Germain, 1999).

One can discern a series – the mother’s body, the mothers’ arms, the parental relationship, the home, the family including cousins and near relations, the school, the locality with its police stations, the county with its laws (Winnicott, 1956b, p.310, cited in Applegate and Bonovitz, 1995, p.33).

Winnicott termed the profound mutuality which develops between the infant and caregiver ego relatedness, to emphasise the relational aspect of the interaction, an emphasis that separates Winnicott from Freud. Freud emphasised the importance to the ego’s structure and function of
the libidinal and aggressive drives, but in emphasising the importance of the relational needs, Winnicott saw here the beginning of the capacity for intersubjectivity and empathy. It is in this bond of relatedness, which provides the basis for the emergence of our self-understanding. Winnicott took the opportunity in his public talks and in his written work, to emphasise that carers only need to be good enough, not perfect.

3.4 Object Relations theory and organizations

3.4.1 “Preconcern” in organizations

We can readily identify within organizations, the sorts of behaviours which are characteristic of the “preconcern” or “paranoid schizoid” position. For example in the characteristic patterns of thought and experience of the state of mind which is experienced as split, as not being integrated, is also a state of mind with which are associated recognizable tendencies toward blame, scapegoating, idealization, persecution, and other distorted perceptions (Krantz, 1998, p.80). One of these distorted perceptions is the state of mind of omnipotence. This is sometimes experienced as a state of mind that holds that history can be wiped, and started again. This idea is of immediate relevance to organizational behaviour, particularly in the context of New Public Management, where what is of most relevance is the ‘here and now’, with little recognition of the past (Little, 1997).

Mechanisms of splitting and projection can manifest themselves in interdivisional organizational splits, emotionally and intellectually disabled individuals, abusive authority relations, and a difficulty for individuals in linking tasks with wider purposes (Krantz, 1998, p.97). As Swogger (1994) has noted, when these processes are operating, “whole classes of people, groups or organizations are condemned while others may be idealized. The world is composed of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p.74). Krantz (1998) cites research on leaders who when operating at the more primitive end of the spectrum, tend to be more grandiose, and hence unrealistic.

These dynamics are recognisable in several current public debates. Some employment policies risk projecting into the unemployed person a large degree of responsibility for his plight. These dynamics underlie in part at least, the “mutual obligation” debate in employment – the person’s obligation to act in a certain way, as a precondition for eligibility for social security payments. Some agricultural industry economic restructuring policies risk “restructuring” the producer’s mindset toward him experiencing that he has failed in his role of making his enterprise profitable, reflected in the “get big or get out” policy perspective (Higgins and Lockie, 2001). It has been argued that our current Prime Minister, during the “Children Overboard” affair in 2001
off the North Australian coast, sought, in a misrepresentation of information to the Australian public through manipulative use of the media, to encourage the public to form a mental picture of refugees attempting to gain entry into Australia (seeking asylum), by throwing their children overboard (Marr and Wilkinson, 2003). The tactic alleged by Marr and Wilkinson, a belief which holds some public support, was the purposeful attempt by government ministers to interpret to the Australian public the behaviours of asylum seekers in this way, which might cause us, on this basis (of falsified official information) to feel less inclined to want to offer asylum to such people. Marr and Wilkinson entitle their book on the subject “Dark Victory”, where the word ‘victory’ suggests that this incident may have played a role in the reelection of the Government of the day, which occurred shortly after this incident.

Other more recognisable day to day examples of efforts to affect our psyches are evident in that stream of marketing intelligence which seeks to subliminally create desires in the minds of possible consumers, with a view to creating a demand for certain products. In the course of writing this thesis, I have come to reflect on the power of systems psychodynamic theories, on the fact that part of public life heavily and consciously makes use of ideas of unconscious processes, yet these ideas in the main lie outside the discourse of much of the organizational, management and evaluation literature.

Clarke (2001) takes the ideas which arise from the notions of projective identification, and develops them in a way which allows for a more ready transition into the psychodynamics of the social world, the links between self, groups and society, in ways which Klein did not attend to. If the projection takes the form of an attack, this can result in destructiveness, but if the projection is made in such a form as to lead to empathy and understanding, this can be experienced as integrating. Hinshelwood talks of this as being an experience of “putting oneself in another’s shoes” (Hinshelwood, 1992, p.133 cited by Clarke, 2001, p.10).

3.4.2 “Concern” in organizations

Roberts (1994) says of the depressive end of the spectrum: “omnipotent fantasy, obsessional ritual and paranoid blaming can give way to thinking: one can seek to know, to learn from experience, and to solve problems” (p.118). Krantz puts it this way: that people can “collaborate as whole people with whole people”. When we are more integrated like this, we can “tolerate complexity, assess reality from multiple perspectives, and understand realistic opportunities. It allows us to take responsibility for our actions, rather than to externalise our unwanted parts and create ‘persecutors’ in our environment” (Krantz, 1998, p. 82) To be enabled to work from the depressive position, is to be
vulnerable without feeling persecuted so that one can learn from experience, to be curious about, rather than fearful of, the unknown, to be able to link with others across important differences, and to be realistically connected to the genuine opportunities and challenges they face (Krantz, 1996, p. 82).

3.4.3 The Holding Environment and organizations

Winnicott’s concept of the holding environment is useful in understanding the basis for social structure within an organizational environment, and about what the organizational equivalents might be to a facilitative care giving environment. Later terminology used in relation the holding environment was that of “containment”. The notion of containment is important when the threatening dynamics experienced in organizations, are considered. For Winnicott the facilitative care giving environment had to allow the space for creative play. This idea of potential space was one of Winnicott’s most important, and most enigmatic, concepts (Ogden, 1980).

The idea of containment provides insight into the importance of the relational aspects of our lives, as central tenets in how we think, behave, create thoughts and ideas, and develop as human beings. It is in relationship which we know our own humanity, and it is through relationship which we develop our self understanding, and our understanding of others (called empathy in this theory).

Gosling and Western (2003) make an interesting observation about Winnicott’s idea of the holding environment. They highlight Winnicott’s view that it is within this holding environment that creativity takes place, and that creativity is present in all healthy individuals. They cite Winnicott’s statement that “in some way our theory includes a belief that living creatively is a healthy state, and that compliance is a sick basis for life” (Gosling and Western, 2003, p.30, citing Winnicott, 1971, p.65). They refer to Winnicott’s admission that we may not have held this view “elsewhere, and in another age”, which they argue “suggests that pathological compliance may be particularly endemic in our contemporary, specifically Western capitalist culture” (Gosling and Western, 2003, p.30). This observation resonates with this thesis, with mandatory evaluation processes across the board in organizations. This observation is also relevant to the increasingly concerning literature about forced compliance in our organizational systems (Ball, 2003). Meyer (1993) draws attention to the threat to the ability to maintain holding environments in today’s organizations. Meyer talks of the “vanishing” holding
environment in pointing to the scarcity of long term care environments as an option in child care services.

While it is within systems psychodynamics that the idea of the “holding environment” has been most developed, it is an idea with some resonance in other literatures. Weick (1996) for example, has highlighted the use Salancik made of the phrase “breathing room” in his published work. In reviewing Salancik’s contribution to organizational theory, Weick said that “he repeatedly tried to unmask subtle influences that constrain options, so that people could gain more breathing room and more control over their own actions in order to mitigate alienating effects” (p.564).

The Action Science scholar, Donald Schon, in his writing on organizational learning, distinguishes between an individual process “by which we deal with uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict”, (Schon, 1983, p.61) done in the course of carrying out a piece of work, and a process carried out within a reflective learning community, which denotes more of a collective and organized process. Schon (1983) and other Action Science colleagues cite the ideal conditions for organizational learning, which hold some common characteristics with the holding space as described in the psychodynamic literature, including a tolerance for error, capacity for doubt, and transparency of information (Friedman, Lipshitz, and Overmeer, 2001). However it was the holding environment as conceptualized in the systems psychodynamic literature which held more resonance for me. This was so for three reasons. The first was due to its applicability across multiple levels of analysis, from the individual level through small group, larger group and organization, and societal level. The second was the insight provided by the way the holding space is conceptualized in Object Relations, and the critical attention it affords the role of the authority figure, as being a more benign presence, offering the safety which facilitates exploration, and hence the energy for problem solving. It points to the likely repercussions when the opposite to an exploratory process is encouraged, such as when coercion is used to facilitate a particular result. The third reason to put forward the holding space idea from systems psychodynamics was the attention it brings to the issue of interdependence of relationships – that our humanity is tied to our relational selves, both in our personal lives and in our work lives. The greater the dependence on each other for survival, paradoxically, the greater the importance of these relationships and at the same time, the greater the threat they impose, as they require trust and other qualities which cannot be guaranteed.
3.4.4 Discussion –Object Relations and organizations

As the analysis of the fieldwork experience will demonstrate in Chapter 5, there were a number of triggers of discomfort for me as researcher which I was later able to understand more fully through the lens of Object Relations theory. I was discomforted by the tendencies toward blaming producers and episodes of project management blaming project staff, by the tendency toward grandiosity of the Senior Executive, by the urgency to have a template approach to evaluation, and the difficulty in keeping open the space for reflection on what was happening within the project. My reading and thinking following the field work revealed the utility of Object Relations theory for understanding the case, and also a greater understanding of the corrosive influence of instrumental thinking and action in organizational life.

The relatedness we have with one another in work environments is not something which can be fabricated, if it is to fulfill its functions of an ethical development of self in community. It is a concept better linked to the idea of relatedness as a state of mind, rather than how it is often set up in organizations in particular, which is by way of a structure which is meant to represent relatedness, such as a Committee structure. It is a concept better linked to the idea of relatedness as a state of mind, rather than how it is often set up in organizations in particular, which is by way of a structure which is meant to represent relatedness, such as a Committee structure. Such a relatedness can become tokenistic. Tokenistic relations can be identified where a committee is set up without the expectation or intention that it would operate as a group which takes up a particular role in an engaged and meaningful manner, or where due to the presence of anxiety, the Committee may have taken on a function as a social defence, a ‘front’. In the absence of this meaningful relatedness, if individuals cannot take up their role, the pathway to emotional disconnection is set, with the ethical and other task losses, which accompany that disconnection.

If the tendency in organizations under pressure is to shift toward a harmful environment in terms of work relationships, this is a different picture from the more dominant rational approach to an understanding of organization life. Object Relations theory goes some way to explaining what would otherwise be an imponderable paradox: if the darker aspects of our psyche, our tendency to want to avoid painful stimuli, to regress from “facing facts”, in Boxer’s terms, are in fact more primal than the rational account would have us believe, this might throw some light on why the existence of the “learning organization” might be more an artefact of the literature than of lived experience in the field (Coopey, 1996). We only have to consider how difficult it is, or can often
be, to have conversations about sensitive topics with those with whom we are in an intimate
to see how much we ask of individuals within organizations to engage with others
in ways that are inherently risky, if one takes the view that meaning making is a process which is
seldom known and determined, but always open to exploration and evolution (Armstrong, 1996;
2005). Openness and evolution are, or can be, inherently risky states of mind, and as Object
Relations theory sets out, such risky states of mind require the presence of certain containers to
maintain these mental states.

New organizational forms such as “collaborations” and “networks”, or in language such as
“learning organization”, depend on different sorts of relatedness than the more traditional
hierarchical setting. If we are to create new organizational forms, such as are proposed in
language such as ‘collaborations’ and ‘networks’, or in language such as ‘learning
organizations’, these forms will require a different sort of relatedness than one might expect to
find between people working in a more traditional hierarchical setting (Hirschhorn & Gilmore,
1992). The case study exposed some of the difficulties experienced in an organizational which
required some interface between these different forms of organization. The differences were not
recognized, valued and the strength of the various working roles and relationships were
misunderstood and mismanaged. For example, the Department cut its ties with the producer
group forming the company when senior staff felt exposed and anxious about how their actions
with the producers could be judged. Senior officers enacted what we fear most in relationships –
that we will be abandoned.

Demands made by the administered environment, the performative North-South axis, are the
particular concerns of this thesis. The administered environment of program implementation, and
program evaluation, makes particular demands, such as requiring involvement of parties in the
evaluation processes, the demand of seeking feedback and then shaping that feedback into
acceptable texts. I found during my field work that there was a requirement to respond to the
imperatives of the administered environment, in particular ways, in ways which I now think used
time and resources and filled the space to the exclusion of more meaningful interaction and
debate.

Through my discovery of the relevance of the Object Relations concepts, I can now more readily
see the defences I experienced in the research as alerts, in ways in which I didn’t see during the
fieldwork. What I experienced as a lack of reflexivity during the fieldwork, is now more clearly
understood as defensive organizational responses to a threatening interdependent environment.
I have referred in chapter 1 to ideas of projectification and of performativity. The projectification term is used by researchers of organizations to understand the impact on individuals and organizations of the increased use of the project as a work form. The term projection, in psychodynamic terms, as Clarke (2002) states, is the process in which we attribute our own affective state to others. It is interesting to consider the possible relationship between the two ideas however. Projectification could be seen as a projection, in which the agent who is carrying out the attribution (the projection) is constituted by the belief system of New Public Management. What is projected is the desire to control, and the belief that certain organizational forms are able to effect that control.

These dominant and dominating requirements of projectification and performativity require a more automated, less exploratory reaction to the events of the project as they unfolded. These requirements may have as their basis assumptions of rationality, for example of explicit and uncontested program goals, assumptions which can not be met, but which work to cloud out other thoughts. Dialogue and shared understandings are hard to achieve, but, in their absence, a more instrumental approach to the subjective and social world gains ascendancy. As evident in the MI project, difficulties such as these were experienced at the different levels of organizational analysis, at the project level and the wider Departmental level, to the detriment of the symbolic work which might have included ideas of how to work through matters such as different ways to formulate the similar and different aspirations of the various parties for the project, in ways in which they could be contained and given some form of representational meaning.

When I look back however on my previous twenty five years of professional practice I have to acknowledge that it is hard to create and hold such spaces in organizations, in the programs that concern us, and that we all collude in the avoidance of the task of creating such spaces. I now see this avoidance in the light of the ideas which emerge when the notions of endemic and social anxieties are considered.

Sloan (1996) comments that we should examine the formal and informal institutions in which we operate against the types of communication and activity it fosters for its participants. “If subjects encounter spaces favourable to the articulation of their needs and their desires for change, they can easily transcend fears and anxieties associated with leaving subjected identities behind” (p.108). Often those in power in these performative times increasingly use the participation and democratic potential offered by critical spaces, as opportunities to sanction and strengthen their own administrative direction, rather than as actual spaces for open dialogue. The prevalence of
top down authority as a medium crowds out the likelihood of being able to use participatory consensus opportunities. We need spaces for self-reflection, for intersubjective communication, and for social action.

Object Relations theory then offers us a picture of the ideal: where we have a developed self, an ability to tolerate strong feelings, to be able to live with ambivalence, to hold a reasonable sense of “self” and “other”, a capacity to test reality, to feel and demonstrate empathy, and to work creatively in the potential space. With these attributes comes the possibility of minimising the collective tendency to split off the discomforting feelings onto others, and to work towards an integrated experience, rather than a fragmentation of self, and a desire to work with “whole objects”, not the idealized picture requiring fabrication. As Bram and Gabbard (2001) highlight, potential space is best thought of as occurring in an interpersonal field. The ideas here are relational ones. We achieve these positive traits essentially through our relationship with others. It follows that organizational and societal pressures that interfere with and alter individuals’ innately relational human tendencies, bring or cause damage to relationships, impair intersubjective communication, and hamper the symbol formation needed to create alternative social forms. When these positive human attributes are too hard to maintain, social defences are required to help us “go on being”.

I turn now to explore some theory that provides insight into how organizational members can build up structures, routines, and technologies, to assist with work tasks, which can also serve to contain or modify anxiety. These organizational systems, while operating as socially structured defence systems, can of themselves give rise to experiences that further arouse anxiety. I argue that the evaluation technologies may serve as a socially structured defence system within the Department, and base this on an analysis of the case study of the evaluation experience of the MI project within the Department.

3.5 Social Defence Theory – Introduction

I draw on the work of Elliot Jacques who first coined the term social defence theory, and was later taken up most famously by Menzies Lyth (1988). It is a central concept to researchers from the systems psychodynamic tradition, and most writers in that field draw on Jacques’ initial conceptualization, and Menzies Lyth’s development. Those researchers I will draw on in this section include Hirchhorn (1988), Wastell (1996), and Krantz (1998).
Jacques’ (1995) seminal work emanated from his consultancy to the Glacier Metal Company. First to use the phrase, Jacques based social defence theory on an understanding of a universal phenomena, which the previous section of Object Relations theory has explored. Social defence theory normalises the organizational responses we so often see, but which are more usually treated as either out of the mainframe of what is being studied, or in some other way not attended to.

Social defences which become manifest in organizations, are materialized through the management system, its hierarchy, its roles and role-relationships, and other characteristics such as its culture and traditions (Chattopadhay & Malhotra, 1991). The institutional task is to try to understand and modify existing defences with a view to then being able to gain access to the issues which are being defended against, and allow productive work on these issues.

The mechanisms by which these defensive structures and techniques are formed are through the collective mental processes, which can be described as a sort of externalising of internal impulses and objects that would otherwise become hard to manage sources of anxiety. This process of externalising gives substance in objective reality to these characteristic psychic defence mechanisms. The psychological needs, then, of the members of an organization, determine these structures, cultures, and modes of functioning. Individuals “make unconscious use of institutions by associating with these institutions and unconsciously co-operating to reinforce internal defences against anxiety and guilt” (Jacques, 1955, p.480). The association with the defence mechanisms of the individual are seen to be reciprocal with those in wider systems, reciprocal in the sense that there is a complementarity, a mutuality, a sense of shared dynamics, albeit experienced within a different system – one an individual system, and one a group of individuals operating within an organizational milieu, and operating using some similar mechanisms – for example, splitting and projection. The system, structures and individuals into whom unwanted impulses are externalised could be aspects of the client group, another organization, or another section of the same organization. The dynamics are in constant interplay.

It is not only the psychodynamic literature that draws attention to defence mechanisms in organizations. Schein notes that social defences are central elements of an organization’s culture. They reflect ritualistic patterns of thinking and acting “that were learned as ways of avoiding painful situations” (Schein, 1985, cited by Wastell, 1996, p.32). Argyris has devoted a lifetime of work to understanding defensive behaviour in organizations (Argyris, 1985, 1993; Friedman, 2000). The emphasis, however, in the work of Argyris and colleagues (broadly grouped under
the label of Action Science) is on the behaviour. The action science intervention broadly speaking, seeks to change the behaviour of individuals, particularly individual leaders. Less attention is paid to analysis of the organizational structures that might either make up, or at least support, the defences that are named (Diamond, 1986).

I have discussed above the positions or states of mind which Klein (1946) labeled paranoid schizoid and depressive, and Winnicott (1965) labeled “pre concern” or “concern” respectively. To briefly recap, the characteristics of the state of preconcern, include the dividing of feelings into different elements, with a spitting of those elements into states of mind which are persecutory primitive in overtone. There is an emphasis on the self, with limited capacity for self reflection, often ending in blaming and scapegoating. In this mind state, individuals find it hard to see issues from multiple planes. The ability to engage in interpersonal relationships is seriously compromised. Thinking is characteristically rigid, concrete and lacking in creativity. In a state of concern, or the depressive position, individuals show a decreased tendency to split good and bad, hold a greater capacity to differentiate, perceive wholes, move beyond self protection, are able to feel vulnerable, as Krantz (1998) holds, without feeling persecuted, and can demonstrate curiosity, assess life realistically and are more able to face challenges. The positions we operate from then as humans, are not just a matter of individuality and our early experiences – the surrounding environment influences these positions. The social defence system, made up as it is from these structures and processes, is a concept which assists us to think about how the structures, procedures and technologies in organizations, and other societal structures such as occupational groups, influence the ability of people to function from the depressive position.

3.6 Menzies Lyth’s elaboration

Menzies Lyth took Jacques’ concept of social defence and developed it in her ‘classic paper on nursing’, as it is referred to; this paper remains the most cited in this field as the most developed exposition of this concept (Menzies Lyth, 1988) While she went on to study children in long stay hospitals and day care institutions, (Menzies Lyth, 1978; 1985) it is her nursing service study for which she is best known.

The defences Menzies Lyth and her team of researchers identified as operating within the nursing service included:

- Splitting up the nurse-patient relationship
• Depersonalization, categorization, and denial of the significance of the individual
• Detachment and denial of feelings
• Attempt to eliminate decisions by ritual task performance
• Reducing the weight of responsibility in decision making by checks and counterchecks
• Collusive social redistribution of responsibility and irresponsibility
• Purposeful obscurity in the formal distribution of responsibility
• Reduction of the impact of responsibility by delegation to superiors.
• Idealization and underestimation of personal developmental possibilities
• Avoidance of change

In summary, Menzies Lyth (1988) states that the logic of the social defence mechanism is to help the individual/organization to avoid the experience of anxiety, guilt, doubt and uncertainty. It does that by eliminating situations, events, tasks, activities and relationships that cause anxiety, or more correctly, “evoke anxieties connected with primitive psychological remnants in the personality” (p.298). In the absence of organizational attempts to assist the individual confront the anxiety provoking experiences, the person does not develop capacity to tolerate and deal more effectively with the anxiety. The fear of confronting the potential anxieties threatens to bring about personal disruption and social chaos. The avoidance however, is never completely successful. “A compromise is inevitable between the implicit aims of the social defence system, and the demands of reality as expressed in the need to pursue the primary task” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.64). The “demands of reality” can also be thought about in Hoggett’s (2003) terms, as a “social anxiety”, an exploration of which focuses more on understanding the threat in its “historical and cultural specificity” while also being attentive to what he calls “existential anxiety”, the more primitive anxieties arising from a set of core developmental conflicts we first negotiate in infancy, which the above discussion on Kleinian thought has elaborated (Hoggett, 2003, p.6). While Menzies Lyth detailed in some length the specific nature of the nursing system in these terms, I provide some detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of some of the cultural specificity of current public sector environments as contributors to what Hoggett calls a “social anxiety” (Hoggett, 2003, p.6).

Menzies Lyth goes on to explore how the social system functioning to deprive the nurses of necessary reassurance and satisfactions. She also examines the extent to which the socially structured defence system itself gives rise to experiences which themselves reassure or arouse anxiety. I continue this line of thought through my own data, where I introduce ideas such as the systemic responses of ‘projectification’, and reframe them as representing an approach to workload management which further splits the staff and project client into ‘manageable’ bits.
These processes add to experiences of failure and letting down of program clients, diffuse responsibility, reduce the capacity of staff to gain an overall picture of a producer’s circumstances, encourage excessive role mobility, and deny the relational qualities inherent in the work. These processes themselves, in effect, become sources of anxiety and stress. In these ways, a defensive psychological detachment is encouraged, a state of mind which is unhealthy for the individual, for the organization, and harms the task which the work system is set up to achieve, given its dependence on relational interactions between the key individuals and groups for its achievements.

In these circumstances it is difficult for the individual to bring the imagined anxiety into contact with reality, and thus anxiety is perpetuated. In this state, we are all diminished, and our capacity for abstract thought, the source of creativity, and for conceptualisation is diminished. It also “inhibits self-knowledge and understanding, and with them, realistic assessment of performance” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.307). Where individuals cannot act in ways which draw on their capacities for concern and empathy, they are prevented from achieving a sense of personal mastery, and are diminished. These traits of self-knowledge, self-expression, and assessments of performance are all matters which the practice of evaluation is expecting program staff to engage with in an open manner. While the traits of the depressive position are positive and ones which we might aspire to, as the holding environment concept illustrates, the values of openness and exploration, the facing of facts and challenges, are demanding and exposing. If organizational climates in performative times are more inclined to exhibit defensive routines, this suggests that for evaluation practitioners to expect openness and exploration from organizational staff, this is not only an unrealistic expectation, but a harmful one, or at least one which risks contributing to the harm caused to individuals in such climates.

3.7 The organizational ritual

Hirschhorn (1988), building on the work of Menzies Lyth, sets out three forms of organizational social defence, only one of which he says is the form Menzies Lyth examines. The three organizational social defences he explores are basic assumption behaviour, the covert coalition, and the organizational ritual.

These three defenses as outlined by Hirschhorn, have overlapping elements. In describing basic assumption behaviour, Hirschhorn (1998) acknowledges the huge legacy of Wilfred Bion to these ideas. The basic assumption behaviour refers to a particular pattern of group behaviour,
where the group “acts as though it believes or assumed that a cohesive group mind exists and can be sustained without work or development” (p.57). The covert coalition is that form of association which is typically seen to arise from our inclination to transfer the feelings we may have had about our parents onto leaders in organization. Part of this association is the tendency also in leaders to treat followers as children. The familiarity of these roles, while often dysfunctional, provide some measure of comfort in their capacity to contain anxiety.

I will only deal here with the organizational ritual here, as it is the defence which is explanatory of the role evaluation took up in the Department in which the case study was carried out. The organizational ritual expresses the idea of a procedure or a practice that takes on a life of its own, and is seemingly unconnected to a rational understanding of experience. “The organizational ritual appropriates the most rational and technical features of organizational life for irrational purposes”. (Hirschhorn, 1988, p.67). He emphasises the impersonality of the character of the ritual. “The defensive process is entirely externalised onto a set of mandated actions and does not depend on the emotional propensities of particular people. It helps all group members depersonalise their relationship to their work”(p.67). He goes on to say that depersonalisation is the foundation of neurotic behaviour, and that “we act out and stay out of touch with reality by discounting the reality of other people and of ourselves” (Hirschhorn, 1988, p.67).

Hirschhorn (1998) says that the organizational ritual is the most durable of the defences he outlines, as it is the most visible, and points out the paradox that as the defence becomes more durable and visible, it also becomes harder to see its relationship to primary anxiety. The symbols and language of the ritual emphasise its rationality.

Thus the defences against anxiety cannibalise group life. As they sink more deeply into work group practice and experience, they invade progressively larger domains of affective and cognitive experience. They appropriate dreams, then relationships, and finally actual work practices. In the process, they turn the irrational into the seemingly rational. This is why it is so hard to change the character and methods of a work group (p.69).

Krantz and Gilmore (1990) take up the idea of the organizational ritual as a social defence, in their argument that the spitting of management and leadership is an organizational ritual of the social defence of “psychological splitting”, a splitting of vision (substance) and implementation (process). With this split, painful challenges of taking action can be avoided; management is devalued and leadership is elevated. The basis of effective problem solving in organizations is
the integration of strategic vision with what is required organizationally to achieve that vision – by attention to the processes by which this will occur. This phenomenon also finds expression in the organizational splitting of ‘purchaser’ and ‘provider’, a management process by which the funder sets out to ‘control’ the implementation of that which has been funded. The lack of integration of policy and implementation further fragments the likelihood of gaining a realistic overview of what is occurring in the field.

Wastell (1996) studied the introduction and implementation of a software system in a mail order company, a system that had at its core a structured methodology for implementation. Wastell found that the system encouraged a rigid and mechanical approach to the task that inhibited creative thinking. He concluded that methodology has the potential to operate as a social defence – a set of organizational rituals with the primary function of containing anxiety. He found practitioners were able to deny their feelings of impotence in the face of the daunting technical and political challenges of system development. Wastell found that while operating as the epitome of rationality, that the ritual was in fact irrational in its operation; the task at hand was not engaged with, but the defence allowed the designers some feeling of security and efficiency. Wastell formed the view that the structured methodologies reflected a metaphor of the development process as a rational technical process. Wastell refers to one promoter of this structural software design, who said that the software had a Midas touch, Midas being the fabled king of Phrygia to whom Dionysus gave the power of turning to gold all that he touched. This image is a precursor to the data I will present in chapter 7, where the Senior Executive of the Department would speak of evaluation in these terms – that it turned into ‘cold hard cash’.

Wastell (1996) discovered that the system developers initially seemed to relish the rigour that such an explicit framework provided, but that it became obvious that it was being followed in a blind mechanical way. Wastell, commenting retrospectively, noted that one of the senior developers of the software system had observed that:

People were investing dataflow diagrams with more formality than they justified….they became more involved with following the methodology and lost sight of what the system was for – they became worried about what task to do next…task 3.2.1, then 3.2.2, and so on (Wastell, 1996, p.26).

Wastell found that while the method had an emphasis on users, that a lot of the developers wanted to avoid talking to the users, and instead, sent them reams of paper which users were asked to “sign off” on. “Sign off became a ritual” (Wastell, 1996, p.27).
The research such as described in this section (Jacques, Menzies Lyth, Hirschborn, Krantz and Gilmore, Wastell), lays the groundwork for my observation and analysis of the implementation of an evaluation project within the Department, with the tendencies toward splitting, projection, and avoidance of conflict. The social defence against anxiety research also provides the concepts to which I will return in Chapter 8, where I elaborate on the idea of containment, a holding environment, as a structure and a strategy, to sustain the difficulties of our work together.

### 3.8 Applicability of these ideas to the case

The challenge in having made the claim that the ideas from systems psychodynamics can illuminate the dilemmas faced in this case study, and explain some of the poor outcomes of the evaluation exercise, is to demonstrate the direct application of these ideas to the case. I have already outlined the level of uncertainty in the project environment in chapter 2, with descriptions of a contested project, contested aims and objectives, lack of consensus on the ideology of the project, and threats from the political environment about the nature of the work. *Uncertainty* has been a topic for organizational theorists for some time (March and Simon, 1958), but the linking of the idea of uncertainty with anxiety in wider systems, is, in the main, the province of those researchers who have applied psychodynamic theories to an understanding of organizations (Hirschhorn, 1988).

I also argue that at a wider systems level, the more chronic forms of uncertainty and anxiety have led to the creation of evaluation structures and processes as efforts toward containment, as structures and processes which might be able to function as a form of containment, but which in fact operate as a systemic social defence, a defence against “knowing” in an experiential sense, what the tensions and dilemmas in the lived reality of programs really are.

The thesis sets out the many levels at which a defence can operate, taking the range to be at the individual level, through to the group, project, and organizational level, and examines the way in which evaluation, through a process of mutual shaping between its technologies and the organizational forces, can become part of those systemic defences. Krantz (1996) suggests that the toxic environment in many of today’s organizations creates an interesting window in which to see the growing pains of the new social defence mechanisms. This case study provides one opportunity to examine such social defences.
These pressures, in an environment which cannot offer a containment of these issues for staff and program participants, and in a performative environment, would be likely to trigger some of the responses which I detail in following chapters. Such responses include

- Examples of depersonalisation and categorization of producers
- Detachment and denial of feelings of staff and producers
- Avoidance of engagement with producers as a group
- Collusive purposeful obscuring of the distribution of responsibility and irresponsibility throughout the organization hierarchy
- Prioritization and reification of managerial approaches to project planning and implementation, including the quantification and demonstration of ‘project deliverables’ at expense of actual engagement with staff and project clients
- The idealization of evaluation as a strategy for its potential for use as an organizational function of communication
- The collusion by the evaluation presence in furthering the belief that it can help embody a system of rationally planned sequential behaviours which can also stand as a proxy for accountability.

Some of the organizational responses designed to control the project environment were illusory – they could not substantiate the control which was sought. Elements of the illusion were that a project can be tightly specified, that objectives can be clearly defined, that there is agreement in relation to multiple purposes a project can serve, that projects can deliver certain outcomes in particular time frame, that it can be accounted for in a reasonably specific manner, and that many of these factors are knowable in advance. The illusion was that these expectations could be met, that control could be maintained over a project, and that these objective markers of success could be used as evidence of a rational system, working according to plan. These defensive responses (the illusions of control), as the nurses experienced in Menzies Lyth’s study, did not in fact alleviate the anxiety in the MI project, anxiety which was experienced at every level of the system. Worse, the illusions created their own barriers to experiencing work as satisfying and productive.

These illusory control devices worked to further propel our actions toward an inauthentic resolution of the dilemmas faced both in the MI project, and in the evaluation.

I propose that the experiences contained in the MI project can be seen not as an extreme case, but as an indicative case, for the following reasons:
there will be increasing conflict over the use of public resources in the future
there is a parallel demand arising from an increased expectation of transparency in government (Edwards, 2001)
there appears to be a growing distrust of government (Nancarrow and Syme, 2001)
the worldwide trend toward shifting responsibility for ‘self management’ to individuals, and an increase in the tendency toward ‘individualism’, often without the resources to accompany the shift in ideology (Rose, 1990)

All these factors point to a policy and program context where ‘working for the government’ will become an increasingly anxiety-provoking place to be, and with this we will see further hardening of social defences, in keeping with an attempt to survive in these environments. I argue that evaluation, in these contexts and with these constraints, and especially in the role of an ‘organizational function’, risks making a negative contribution. I explore how it might be otherwise in the final chapter.

I am concerned to maintain a focus at the organizational level, while giving detail of the defensive reactions of individuals. I emphasise the system viability, not the individual liability.

I am concerned however for the individual, and in Chapter 7 I introduce the idea of working toward a different discourse to that which pervades the ‘accountability’ discourse at present. The alternative discourse, one of ‘responsibility’, has as a basis the individual, in the sense of the individual in authentic engagement both within oneself, as well as the individual in a relational engagement with others.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has introduced Object Relations theory, with its origins in clinical work, particularly as commenced and developed from the Tavistock Clinic in London, but now with widespread application to several forms of social life, particularly its utility in furthering an understanding of aspects of life in organizations. It both normalizes the extremes of emotion experienced in group life, and points to the dangers when our thinking becomes stuck in the extremes of these dynamics. A major strength of this theory is the centrality is gives to the relational aspects of our development, and of how we live our lives. The theory provides a way of thinking about how defences can become routinised and begin to serve other purposes in organizations, such as defences against anxiety. It also provides the basis for ideas which I will
explore more fully in Chapter 8, where I discuss how the concept of containment might be taken up in thinking about evaluation practice within organizations.
Chapter 4 The Research Journey

4.1 Introduction

The process of evaluation work is a relatively new topic for Higher Degree research in Australia. My own research is the first PhD level of work on evaluation undertaken at my University. I wanted to share my insights into the research processes I experienced during my fieldwork, to make a contribution to an agenda for research methodology in evaluation practice for future students. The originality of this research is a particular strength of the thesis. Dahler-Larsen (2000), in writing of one of the uses of evaluation as “persuasive use”, the use of evaluation to defend pre-defined interests, says that such evaluation work leave almost “no empirical trace on the scene” (p.72). Other evaluation leaders have expressed to me the lack of literature on this domain of evaluation processes (personal communication, House, 2003), particularly over a lengthy period, which in this research, was a period of approximately two years. While the research story is a difficult one to tell, I do it in the interests of future student journeys along this path.

The first section following outlines the research questions I began the thesis journey with, and sets out how these questions broadened in the course of the fieldwork. I then provide an overview of the research approach by introducing Burawoy’s (1998) ‘extended case study’ method, making reference to the spectrum of roles along the participant observer continuum which I took up at different points of the fieldwork. Reflexivity is a pivotal concept discussed in this section. This is followed by a more in depth account of the four principles that guide the extended case study – the principles of intervention, process, structuration, and reconstruction.

Next I introduce a new concept which I have termed the “researcher’s deal”. In discussing the research agreement I made with the Department in this way, I provide an account of the terms under which I entered the field, terms which held a reciprocity. The seeds of the difficulties and subsequent compromises I made, were sown at this point. I then develop the compromises I made in the evaluation in terms of ‘role strain’, and outline some of the forces which gave rise to this.

I then return to Burawoy’s extended case study method and the ‘effects of power’, and set out the difficulties I experienced managing these effects and the resulting shame I felt. I outline the warrant I make for the research finding, and also set out the limitations of the study. I give
considerable attention to the ethical issues encountered in the research, some of which have already been flagged in the preceding sections.

I next provide a discussion of the various roles I took up, and the sort of data that these different positions gave rise to, particularly that data which arose from my presence and intervention as an evaluative researcher into the system, which in practice meant deriving data from the role of evaluation coordinator, a role which has some affinity with the idea of both a practice researcher, and a participant observer, and reflecting from within the research role, how the intervention of the coordinator’s role could be understood.

In closing this chapter, I summarize the chapter, and introduce the following chapter, which sets out key evidence at the project level, from which I draw research findings.

4.2 The Research Questions

This case study involved exploratory research in which my initial aim was to examine the feasibility of linking an evaluative role collaboratively with project practitioners to iteratively develop knowledge together, where the results of the work could be adapted to and integrated into a formative evaluation of use to internal and external stakeholders.

The research questions at issue initially were: if it was feasible to develop such knowledge with practitioners, what would be the key requirements and demands of such a practitioner-researcher partnership? If it was not possible, what were the barriers to the development of such a model? This chapter sets out how I came to understand and make meaning of the challenges I faced in this pursuit. It focuses on how these findings might contribute to the theory and practice of evaluation.

Given the requirement of all projects within the Department to carry out evaluation and the availability of resources to do so, I presumed an ‘evaluation rich’ context. The project into which I was invited as a student also had an exploratory question it would have to answer: what could be learnt about producers’ responses to the project which would assist in better delivering the project in ways which would keep the producers engaged? The shift of the research focus from the practitioner/producer interaction to that of the organization was not anticipated. There were shifts in the three main areas of relevance to the research: within the project, with the evaluation processes, and within the research task. These shifts are summarized in Figure 8 below.
### 4.3 Overview of the research approach

In describing my research approach, I distinguish between research method (in this case, extended case method) (4.3.1 summary below), the deployment of particular techniques of empirical investigation (in my case, largely participant observation, particularly on the participant end of that continuum) (4.3.2 below) and also an overarching research model, one which in my case is best termed ‘reflexive’, a term I elaborate on at 4.3.3, below.

#### 4.3.1 Origin of Extended Case Study

Burawoy attributes the origins of the phrase “extended case study” to the Manchester School of Social Anthropology, whose concerns were focused on what people were actually doing, rather than what they said they were doing, or what they “ought” to do (Burawoy, 1998, citing Van Velsen, 1967). The focus of this School then is on the real events and dramas in everyday life in

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### Figure 8  Hopes and actualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outset of project</th>
<th>Outset of Evaluation</th>
<th>Outset of Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hope</strong></td>
<td>Some consensus that a new way to market product was required.</td>
<td>Enthusiastic approach to learning from producers’ responses about the viability of an innovative high stakes project</td>
<td>Expected to be able to do continuous, iterative cycles of evaluative activity highlighting the contextual relevance of producers’ responses, while researching the barriers to developing this form of formative evaluation with practitioners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected to be able to attract enough producers using its project staff producer relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crisis</strong></td>
<td>Project experiences difficulty with targets through planned means (both consignment building, and the development of the Supply Structure company).</td>
<td>Barriers to ongoing association with staff group, whose roles changed; evaluation increasing tightly proscribed. Evaluation cannot focus on learning and improvement as planned</td>
<td>Initial research task impeded; period of not knowing what direction to take.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
<td>Achievement of some intended outcomes through other means, with overall mixed success</td>
<td>Evaluation focuses on presenting a coherent story of success</td>
<td>Research task to document and analyse the defensive organizational environment and the collusion of evaluation in this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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their focal setting, with the consequential contradictions these throw up. My case study approach has its foundation in the ‘extended case study’ method.

4.3.2 Participant observation

Participant observation, while a much used approach in research, finds its roots in the area of research in anthropology known as ethnography (Homans, 1950). Schwandt (1997a) refers to the field of ethnography as having a specific focus on cultural behaviour (p. 44). Morgan (1997) describes “quasi-ethnographic” research, which aims to understand the situation fully and richly, but where the depth is not of the order of the “thick descriptions” of more immersed ethnography (Geertz, 1973). Fine (2003) uses the term “peopled ethnography”, to refer to those research efforts which aim to provide an insight into a particular setting, and which use vignettes from the case to enable access to an exploration of “organized routines of behaviour” (p.41). My vignettes, like Fine’s are drawn from the extensive range of case material – observation, my experience in carrying out my role as evaluation coordinator, and exposure to the narratives which organizational members tell about themselves. For Fine, the researcher is part of the group being studied, and in this way, is a participant observer.

For me, the role of culture, as in the ‘performativity’ aspects of the public sector, was an emergent finding, rather than a construct I commenced the research with from the outset. In my research, the wider sense of ethnography as ‘field study’ is therefore more apt. I have found some of the anthropological research literature helped my thinking about methodology, and I use some of the ideas from this literature without suggesting I saw myself as conducting anthropological work in the more formal sense. I saw myself methodologically as acting more in that domain. In addition, I could not afford to take the lower profile that some participant observation approaches can take, due to the doubling of my research role with the role of evaluation coordinator. I discuss the irreconcilable role conflict which this came to pose, later in this chapter.

Taking such an ‘immersed’ role also as a coordinator of the evaluation tasks, from within the project team, gave me access not just to the project team, but to those responsible for the delivery of the evaluation within the Department’s hierarchy. Access to, and interactions with, the key shapers of the evaluation process became more important than I had explicitly envisaged at the outset of the research.
4.4 Reflexive Research

The word ‘reflexive’ connotes the interactivity of the research process. Its meaning in this study is more than the idea of ‘reflectivity’. Schwandt (1997a) discusses two approaches to reflexivity. The first is “a traditional interpretation…[which] signals the processes of critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences and so forth” (p.136).

I use the word reflexivity more in keeping with Schwandt’s second approach to defining the word, where he says that it “points to the fact that the inquirer is part of the setting, context, and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand” (p.136).

For the inquirer to be part of the setting she wishes to understand, carries both benefits and risks. I discuss the risks more fully in section 4.9 on Ethics, as the dilemmas I experienced were particularly moral ones. Burawoy (1998, pp. 14-16) sets out four principles of the reflexive approach, principles that embrace the connectedness of the research to the setting: Intervention, Process, Structuration and Reconstruction. The implications of these principles for the case are discussed below.

4.4.1 Intervention

The researcher is an active participant, is herself an “intervention” in the field of inquiry. As Burawoy notes, “it is by mutual reaction that we discover the properties of the social order” (p.14).

*Intervention* in this case study meant that I actively took up a role within a project that was housed within a larger public sector bureaucracy. The role of evaluation coordinator became my point of intervention in the research setting, which in this case was my intervention within a project context working alongside project staff, while we conceptualised their intervention with the project client.

Nesting a research role within the evaluation coordinator’s role, at least during the fieldwork, brought considerable strains. None of the categorizations of fieldwork research roles, within ethnographically oriented research that I have read, have captured the complexity I experienced (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.104, citing Junkers’ theoretical social roles; Gustavsen, 2004). I was not an organizational member “with ordinary rights and obligations” (Gustavsen, 2004, p.159). However, while I was not dependent on the Department for my ongoing
employment after the research was completed, I did ‘need’ the fieldwork to form the basis of my thesis.

Perhaps one of the descriptors closest to the reality of my own research role was the phrase “honorary insiders”, a phrase used by Johnson and Scott (1997) to describe their role as social work academics undertaking research in settings with which they had close personal and professional links. In relation to my own role, I would add the words “by proxy” to the phrase “honorary insider”, in that I was borrowing from the preexisting relationships which existed between the University staff where I was enrolled, and the evaluation staff of the Department. This made for particular sensitivities in the field work. At times I was very conscious of these preexisting relationships, and what effect my thesis might have on them.

I chose to study my topic as “holistically” as I could manage. I presumed I would both shape, and be shaped by, the interactive aspects of the fieldwork events, although not to the extent which occurred in the course of the research. Once engaged with the field, a process of “progressive focusing” followed, during which what I was seeing and experiencing became more differentiated and amenable to conceptualization (Parlett and Hamilton, 1977).

4.4.2 Process

Burawoy’s second principle of “process” emphasises the idea of emergence. The factors that go to make up the detail of organizational processes are highly varied, contextual, historically situated; they are unpredictable, and their quality is one of emergence. This reality requires a research strategy which recognises and anticipates this process, and one which can describe and try to understand the practical social contexts of everyday life within an organization (Mintzberg, 1979). I discuss below my unpreparedness however for both the direction and the speed of the flux which was inherent in the idea of embracing “process”, in this particular case.

Kushner’s (2000) acknowledgement of Stenhouse’s understanding of process in his work in curriculum evaluation struck a strong chord for me. Stenhouse was interested in the case study approach in education, for its capacity to illuminate the world of teaching, and the idea of the teacher practitioner as researcher. Kushner’s valuing of Stenhouse’s concern with the “quality of the journey” was of particular importance to me, as, while we may not be able to control a range of preconditions and outcomes in the work we are engaged in, we can try and take responsibility for the “quality of the journey” (Kushner, 2000, p.209, referring particularly to Stenhouse, 1967). Kushner said that Stenhouse was vitally interested in the medium through which individual human minds interact with each other in communication. It was the quality of such
communication which most preoccupied him and it is this which make his ideas so relevant to evaluators, for we, too, are primarily charged with improving the quality of exchange (Kusher, 2000, p. 207).

One of the several strategies that Stenhouse highlighted was the need to document both sides of a tension, and then to analyse the sides in interaction. He was concerned with the “judgment of wholes”, an orientation to which I have aspired in this research (Stenhouse, 1978, cited in Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2002, and also cited in Kushner, 2000).

In keeping with the extended case method approach, my intervention was one which required immersion in both the field work and the subsequent process of coming to an understanding of the data. I intended, explicitly, to use my experience in practice as a conduit for learning. This was not an engagement with what Usher (1985), citing Saljo (1979), calls learning as an increase in knowledge, a memorising, or an acquisition of facts that could be used in practice. The conception of learning entailed in the extended case method is one of “an interpretive process aimed at the understanding of reality” (Usher, 1985, p.64, citing Saljo, 1979), with a particular focus on learning through experience. But these interactive processes require a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) or container in which meaning can be supportively explored; the elements to form this container were lacking within the project, within the Evaluation Unit in the Department, within the research structure at least within the fieldwork, and within the University support structure. One of the results of this circumstance, was what eventuated as a considerable time between the field work and arriving at the thesis, the implications of which I deal with further below when I discuss some of the ethical issues I encountered in documenting my findings.

Critical incident technique is an approach used to draw on experiential (Flanagan, 1954; Fook, 1996), and is an approach I have used in this thesis. It was Flanagan (1954) who is credited with documenting this technique. The way this technique is often used is for the researcher to ask research subjects to describe a specific incident which was critical (significant) to them, by way of gaining access to concrete and in-depth information about specific events, which could then be analysed in a variety of ways. I am familiar with the use of this technique in studying perceptions of quality service in nursing (Norman et al, 1993), and also in teaching (Brookfield, 1994). Fook (1996) points out that there is a similarity between the basis of the critical incident technique, and some of the narrative techniques which have been used in family work, uncovering family “myths” (Fook, 1996 citing Hartmann, 1991) and in the technique of deconstructing a narrator’s language to reveal hidden meaning (Fook, 1996 citing Kellehear,
My use of this technique in the thesis is more in keeping with Fook’s association of the idea as a narrative approach, which results in a series of vignettes in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The vignettes provide building blocks to construct the dynamics operating in the project and influencing the evaluation. By adopting vignettes, I maintain a way of considering the evaluation in its organizational and societal environment, with the range of complex forces impinging on it over time. I have presented a careful analysis of vignettes analysed for themes and forces effecting evaluation – in their wholeness over time. Analysis of the vignettes was triangulated via documents, interviews and participant observation to establish validity.

That the vignettes would house elements of the broader themes which I generate from the data has its origins in several theoretical approaches to understanding organizations which suggest we look more widely at the systems within which our initial focus of concern exists. Smith and Simmons (1983), writing from a systems psychodynamic point of view and drawing from holographic theory, suggest that we can find pictures of the whole contained within the parts, if only we can develop different ways of looking at the parts (p.390). Fineman (1996), in his study of the complexities for staff of a regulatory authority in carrying out environmental protection work with English industries, talks of “actors expressing scripts conditioned by wider social structural constraints and opportunities” (p.493). Emery and Trist (1973) emphasise the dependency of the system and the environment on each other, calling this an ecological perspective. Morgan (1983) draws on cybernetic theory to look at mutual causality of the organization and the environment. Bigelow (1992, p 147, cited by Starkey, 1996) talks of this capacity of taking a broader view as an attribute of wisdom, and its association with an ability to perceive the broader picture, and the “connectedness of things”. I have found in this research that is has been essential to become involved in the organizational processes in order to be able to access and draw out the wider meanings and their connectedness.

4.4.3 Structuration

The third of Burawoy’s principles is structuration. This principle relates the situated details of observation and experience, to the external field, which is itself in a process in flux. The external field cannot be held constant, as it is autonomous and highly turbulent, unable to be frozen. In the main, it lies outside of immediate field of investigation.

Giddens (1984) describes structuration as a process that refers to the production and reproduction of the social systems through members’ use of rules and resources in interaction. Rules and resources are used interchangeably with the terms ‘structures’. Rules can be seen as an
implicit formula for action, and resources as the personal traits, abilities, knowledge and possessions that people bring to interactions. These interactions can both produce structures and reproduce them when the actions reinforce features of the system which are already in place (Poole & Corman, 2000).

Structuration is, as Burawoy (1998) suggests, a complex phenomenon, which links both micro and macro level activity. Burawoy notes that while Giddens has made ‘structuration’ the leitmotif of his work, Burawoy thinks that Giddens has a more “enabling” emphasis on the concept, on the more facilitating aspects of structure, and ends up deemphasising structure, by suggesting, through the idea of a ‘voluntarist vision,’ which is a vision that we hold the control over our worlds. Burawoy says of himself that he is more conventional in his position on structuration, which is that “structure, or social forces, really do confine what is possible, although they are themselves continually reconfigured” (p.15).

Burawoy shares some common ground here with the poststructural theoretical emphasis. This perspective holds that we need to take greater account of the multiplicity of meanings, and discourses, and contextual influences on our subjectivity, and affirm our situatedness as changing, contradictory, and multifaceted. These ideas are in keeping with the methodological approach which suggests that researchers should not hold too tightly to a particular theoretical interests, but leave themselves open to the phenomena which emerge during observation (Bogdan and Taylor, 1984, p.18).

This idea of structuration can be seen in part as arising from and integrally associated with intervention and process, as it flows directly from these two prior processes. It is in this sense too that Bogdan and Taylor’s (1984) instruction to researchers to “get their feet wet”, makes sense (p.18). It is in the process of getting one’s feet wet, involvement in the field through intervention, over a period of time, that the subtle intricacies of structuration processes can either be observed or experienced, or as Weick (1995) would have us understand, can sometimes only be made understandable with reflective work after their occurrence.

The idea of reflexivity, referred to above, is relevant too to the idea of structuration, as it draws our attention to the acceptance of the position that the researcher will be shaped by, and also seek to understand, her “prejudices, preunderstandings” and her own sociocultural locations, “including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.11, p.16).
It is in this sense of reflexivity that Crick’s comments about the autobiographical nature of anthropological enquiry make sense. He notes that “anthropological knowledge, after all, is not about the other, it is generated by the mutual definition of “us” and “other” and is therefore inherently autobiographical” (Crick, 1982, p.15). Or as Scott phrases it, “the challenge of what ethnographers call “reflexivity” is to attempt to look at the lens at the same time that one is looking through it” (Scott, 1990, p.556).

These ideas have assisted me to give form to the complex forces I experienced in the case study which led to a particular shaping of the ‘end product’ of the evaluation work, being a straightforward and tension free account of the project. I will argue that this came about only at the end of a series of processes both internal to the project, and also in interaction with the social, political and psychodynamic forces in the Departmental context experienced while carrying out the evaluation work itself. I had lost the path Stenhouse laid out – of valuing the processes of eliciting the complexities of the situations we found ourselves in, and valuing the quality of the journey. This ‘process’ discourse, with those values attached, could not find a toe hold in the performative organizational climate. It was neither relevant, nor valued, there.

### 4.4.4 Reconstruction

Burawoy’s (1998) fourth principle is reconstruction. This links to the principle of process, in that the context effect which comes about because this sort of research requires us to move through space and time with people, and to try to apprehend the contextual knowledge which this requires, in fact, demands. How we move with this greater awareness of the situation, the context, is to reduce by aggregation: we examine from as many vantage points as possible the phenomenon under study, and then aggregate these into social processes. It is this move from situational knowledge to social process, which Burawoy examines in his principle of “reconstruction” (p.15).

Burawoy holds that, however ill developed, we start with some theoretical ideas. He says we start with our favourite theory, and that in the course of the research, we reconstruct our theory. While I cannot say I took the opposite starting point (Burawoy would place the process of working with ‘grounded theory’ as an opposing position to that of the ‘favourite theory’ idea of ‘reconstruction’ here) neither did I start with a favourite theory.

In my own case, rather that as Burawoy suggests above, that we start with our favourite theory, I started with some ‘middle ground’ theories (Merton, 1968). The terms used in the literature for
the differentiation of ‘types’ or ‘levels’ of theory vary. Bogdan and Taylor (1984) hold that researchers typically have broad questions in mind and that these questions can often be thought of in two broad categories – substantive and theoretical, where substantive questions are seen to include questions related to specific issues in a particular type of setting, and where theoretical are more closely tied to basic sociological issues such as “socialization”, or “deviance”, and “social control”. Glaser and Strauss (1967) used the terms substantive theory and formal theory (p.32) making similar distinctions. Where Bogdan and Taylor use the terms substantive and theoretical, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) distinguish between a topical and a generic research problem, where the topical is that concerned with types of people and situations readily identified in everyday language (p.31). Hammersley and Atkinson see these terms topical and generic as closely related to the distinction between substantive and formal analyses outlined by Glaser and Strauss.

Among some of the middle ground theories I began the research with, included some views about the validity and utility of practice research, and the difficulty practitioners have in making the time to reflect on and conceptualise their day to day practices (Epstein, 2001), and also my more immediately prior experience with particular evaluation projects. I had excluded these more recent difficulties with evaluation from my mind, and concentrated on the former issue of practitioners finding it difficult to make time to reflect on their practice.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) emphasise that these two levels of analysis (with whatever labels we ascribe to these levels) do not proceed in a unidirectional way, but with a constant movement back and forth between these modes. “Substantive issues may suggest affinities with some formal concept that will, in turn indicate substantive issues as deserving new or further attention, and so on” (p.31).

The four years following the fieldwork experience, were spent in a form of shuffle, back and forth, to arrive at the thesis I am putting forward. It is my aim that the in-depth understanding of the case in its particulars provides the foundation from which to transcend this setting, into more general theoretical insights.

The idea of “extending out”, of moving from the phenomenon under study to wider social processes, is implicit in a wide range of scholarship. Dorothy Smith’s (1988) work, for example, moves from the concrete lived experience of women, their “microstructures” of everyday life, to build her theory of male dominated macro structures. Sharma (2001) has used Smith’s perspectives to examine the ruling societal structures in the conceptualization of immigrant non-
citizen categories. Smith and Corse (1986) urge consultants to be more open in their interpretative work, when trying to understand the internal life of any system to try and see it “in terms of its place in a rapidly changing ecology, and that understanding the rules upon which the larger ecosystem operated may be pre-eminently critical for appreciating intraorganizational dynamics” (p.271). I have had to be particularly mindful of the pressures in the larger ecosystems in my reconstruction of the dynamics in the MI case.

4.5 The Researcher’s Deal

I hadn’t come to this work with a ‘blank mind’. I was carrying what Malinowski called “foreshadowed problems” (Malinowki, 1922, pp.8-9, cited by Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.25).

While I didn’t conceptualise it like this at the time, I think that in being prepared to do at least some of the more tedious tasks of documentation of project activities and changes, that I was in fact engaging in “reciprocity as a field technique”, and also in some ways, trading the doing of this work, for some measure of informed consent (Wax, 1982). I discuss this ‘deal’ further in 4.9 of this chapter on Ethics, where I elaborate on the role conflict I experienced due to the increasing pulls on the evaluation coordinator’s role from the more senior parties in the bureaucratic hierarchy on one hand, (the initial gatekeepers to the research) away from the more lateral pull, including my own inclination, toward the perspectives of the producers, the client group for whom the project was allegedly planned and implemented. These tensions within the evaluation coordinator’s role, I came to see as a clear case supporting the predictive capacity of the Compass model – that the dynamics on the North-South axis will tend to dominate.

Wax (1982) makes the point that fieldworkers have repeatedly observed that the ‘host population’ seldom focus their attention on the goals and formal design of the project, but direct themselves to assessing:

1. the sponsorship of the research
2. the character and disposition of the researcher
3. the immediate utility and direct benefit of project activities in their own lives (p. 43-44).

Taking Wax’s focus on gatekeepers raises the question of the implications for the research of the turnover in roles at this level, which, in turn, casts further light on the tenuousness of the researcher’s deal. The focus on the immediate utility to project gatekeepers of a research
relationship also draws attention to the inherent powers of the performative North-South administrative axis, which at times envelope the individual wishes and hopes of particular managers and leaders. When I was first approached by the Project Manager to join his project, he was quite clear in his expectations that he had something to offer me, which was a place within a project to do my research, given I needed to find such a space for my fieldwork, a project in which to participate, over at least a twelve month period, so I could track the responses to interventions over time. The Project Manager seemed clear to the point of being perfunctory, that he needed someone to help with the coordination of the evaluation activities, a task that was obligatory. He clearly saw reciprocity of interests, while not using this word. As he was new to the Department, and as aspects of the project were managed at a level higher than his, he referred me to the Program Leader for final discussions about the detail of my association with the Department, and the negotiation of a student allowance for the duration of the Project. In my conversations with the Program Leader, he too showed more interest in the potential benefits to the MI Project of my participation, than eliciting much information from me about my research requirements. I regarded this as quite normal, and was in fact relieved not to have to provide detail about a research process which I knew would be emergent. He told me that he too was relatively new to this Department, and recounted experience in his previous job where a PhD student had played a key role in one of their projects. This student, in the mind of the Program Leader, had “held this particular project together”, and had played a large part in its success. I wondered at the time if I would prove to be so useful.

I have described above an instrumental reciprocity – instrumental in the sense that I presumed, and program leaders hoped, my presence would be practically useful to the project. Wax develops the idea of reciprocity beyond the benefits brought by a researcher to a community (such as the ability of a researcher to assist the community with matters they are less familiar with, or other social or financial benefits) to the idea of the researcher entering into the “networks of reciprocity with the host community”, and that in entering those networks, that “hosts and fieldworkers recognise each other as fellow, moral human beings, and enforce on each other the adherence to a suitable set of moral norms” (Wax, 1982, p.45).

In my position of evaluation coordinator, I failed to achieve this agreed set of moral norms within the project relationships, a claim I will provide evidence for in the section in Ethics at Section 4.9 below. Suffice to say here that what ensued was considerable difficulty in the research relationship, particularly in my own internal conflict, between the requirements of the Department, on the one hand, and my desire to offer some degree of realistic representation of the difficulties experienced by the producers on the other. While Wax argues for the implicit
basis of participant observation as one of parity (with the researcher and the hosts as peers), this idea goes to the heart of the ethical dilemmas I experienced as a researcher in this project. My experience of feeling sharply divided between the gatekeepers and the perspectives of the client group was acute, and aspirations for parity were quickly swallowed.

I had understood that once past the gatekeepers, I could develop a working relationship with the practitioners in the MI project. This aspiration meant I could invoke at least some of the values of those writers who espouse a participatory research perspective (Reason, 1988; Heron, 1996), though the persons with whom I was participating, in my case, would predominantly be the project staff, rather than program clients. There was no organizational structure in which these expectations and subsequent realignments which occurred could be contained, understood, and explored for their meaning to the research, to the evaluation coordinator’s role and to the evaluation itself. The absence of such an organizational structure, negotiated by the involved parties, as is often built in collaborative projects, proved to be an ongoing problem during the research. I return to this point below, and also in the final chapter. The absences of a ‘container’ for the fieldwork aspects of the research work, and absence of a container with appropriate authority in the evaluation coordination work, are key findings for further elaboration. I discuss ways to rethink these structural deficits in the last chapter.

Burawoy notes that “to penetrate the shields of the powerful, the social scientist has to be lucky and or/devious” (Burawoy, 1998, p.22). I did not set out to problematise the power structure within the project, to the extent that the higher echelons of the Department hierarchy represented the power structures. Even though these structures became problematic, (or they were always so and I only came to realise this with experience), I cannot say I was able to penetrate them. But given that evaluation was a pursuit of considerable use to the higher echelons of the Department, it brought me closer to the ‘shields of the powerful’ than evaluation of this sort might otherwise have come.

**4.6 Role and role strain**

**4.6.1 Role – an introduction**

The concept of role provides a reference point for my discussion of the role conflict I experienced as evaluation coordinator, and as researcher. After a period of struggle, I altered the state of overt conflict by colluding with the administrative requirements of the North-South axis, contributing to what I argue was an inauthentic final Project Report, and to my individual
response of experiencing a “false self”. I give examples of both the inauthenticity of the Final Project report, and the concept of a “false self”, in chapter 5.

While I set out some orientation to the concept of role below, I do so acknowledging the very considerable scholarship on role in sociology (Turner, 2001), in systems psychodynamics (Reed, 2000), and in evaluation (Ryan and Schwandt, 2002).

The original meaning of the word role is said to have come from the French word ‘roule’, originally the roll of paper containing an actor’s part (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 2002). Its origins then were ‘structural’, in the sense that the role was something you were given. Interactional role theorists give greater weight to the fluidity of role – that it is within the mutually shaping interactions with the dynamics of the occasion that present themselves in our lives that we can not only ‘take up’ a role, but also engage in “role making” (Turner, 2001, p.22). This idea ties in with the notion of structuration referred to earlier by Burawoy (1998), which is also evident in Pierson’s (1998) statement, that “society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do” (p. 77). Turner further adds that role cannot exist without other roles to which it is oriented.

Turner (2001) holds that one of the factors which affects how a role develops, is its ‘representationality’ – by which he means how do we understand what a role represents. This is a different perspective from the question of its functionality, and from that of tenability, that is, is there someone willing to play the role? The question of representationality asks what is the image which this role projects. It was only as the MI project unfolded that I grew to understand the difficulty in the evaluation coordinator role, when the role was subjected to pressures from within the project, from higher up in the Department, and from the environment, to only tell a certain sort of story.
It was within these tensions of the evaluation coordinator’s role that I used this role experience as a key source of data for my research role. I represent this in Figure 9 below:

**Figure 9  Person – Role – System**

![Diagram of Person – Role – System](Adapted from Newton, 2004)

Figure 9 above sets out visually, two sets of overlapping fields. Of the two upper circles, the one to the left represents the evaluation coordinator’s role, and to the right, what I came to see as a Departmental requirement of a specific form of evaluation product, a very favourable and straightforward account of a project. The two circles in the lower part of the figure represent the research role, and the output of that role, the production of a thesis.

The role strain I experienced was particularly pronounced in the overlapping areas marked A and B in Figure 9 above, that is, between my understanding of my role as evaluation coordinator, and the Department’s requirement of the role, and arising from this, role strain between the evaluation role and the research role.

**4.6.2 Role strain**

Turner (2001) cites Goode who says that role strain, experienced as anxiety, tension and frustration, is likely to occur if the sources of that anxiety and tension are closely related to one’s identity or self (p.249).

A considerable part of my personal and professional identity was tied up in an orientation toward the ‘program client’, in this case, the producers. When I left my previous work jointly located in a School of Social Work and at an acute hospital, to study further in the field of program evaluation, and within this particular context, a (Social Work) Professor from the United States who had encouraged my practice research interests, wrote to me, saying while she knew little of
the sector into which I was moving, she felt the important thing “is that you’re working in the field with the very people who will be affected by the study findings” (personal correspondence, 2000), making it clear later into the correspondence that by “people who will be affected”, she was meaning the producers. This point she made in this correspondence locates the heart of my conflict.

Menzies Lyth (1988), whose work I have discussed at some length in the previous chapter, emphasizes that “there is nothing more painful, more productive of anxiety, depression, and despair, than not being able to succeed in a task which has deep psychological significance for oneself” (Menzies Lyth, 1961, cited by Miller & Rice, 1975, p.67. Emphasis added).

Reed (2000) states that role is a patterning of ideas by which a person organizes their behaviour in relation to a particular situation, seen as a system. In taking on the evaluation coordinator’s role, one of the particular aspects of that role that had psychological significance for me, and which was linked to both my professional social work identity and my personal identity, was the belief that I could elicit program data from clients/producer participants, and also contribute to the analysis of that feedback as gleaned by the frontline staff, and that the shared meaning, or multiple meanings derived from this interactive process would be represented, in some way, in the overall picture of the program and its environment. Pressures in the system in which the project was located led to a minimizing of the producer perspectives that were raised during the project. These processes reduced the likelihood that the producers’ perspectives could be raised for discussion, or represented in writing. Elements of the project which were the most difficult to raise were those which were more ambiguous, less determinate, and less favourable to the Department. As these elements made up a considerable portion of the feedback from producers, these issues posed considerable strain on my role as evaluation coordinator.

Reed (2000) emphasizes that the three constructs of person, role and system are continuously interacting, and that if a perception of the system is changed, either in the person, role or system, or by external forces, the shape of the role of individuals will be transformed. As I emphasize in the thesis, the project leaders were themselves operating in a very uncertain climate. There is a particularly good example of this system change phenomenon which I address more fully in chapter 5. In this example the Department had to be particularly careful about how it represented the work it had done with the members of the Supply Structure company. This was due to the perceived threats from the organizational environment, that its work in facilitating the development of the Supply Structure company could be construed as work which lay outside the legislative requirements of the Public Service Act. These systemic shifts had a pronounced affect
on my role as Evaluation Coordinator, and on the role relatedness between the producer members of this group, and the project leaders.

Reed (2000) also emphasizes that aims may also be transformed, with the inevitable challenge to desire, belief and motivation. This can result either in fragmentation, or deeper coherence among the relevant people as they consider the impact of these fragmentations. “The more that persons can find, and remake, and take their transformed roles, the greater their ability to contain those anxieties without being blown away by them” (Turner, 2001, p.251). In the MI case study, at least in the time of the project, the change in roles and role relatedness, led, in my view, to further fragmentation for all parties. I have only been able to attain a measure of deeper coherence after considerable time and further intellectual and emotional work. It was only in my research role, depicted as the lower level of the “Person – Role” system in Figure 7, that I could create, with intellectual and emotional support, this coherence. This took considerable time, and extended well into the period following the end of the fieldwork. This is not an opportunity which is open to every day project workers and managers, however reflective and ‘evaluative’ in their thinking they might be, who are required to move onto the next project, and work out in their own way, or set aside, the unfinished business of difficulties encountered within the work. The student role has for me been psychologically restorative.

Reed (2000) holds that in the face of organizational turmoil, personal qualities will determine how the inevitable risks, confusions, and uncertainties are handled. While this is doubtlessly true, this statement of Reed does not give adequate attention to the structural issues within a project environment which might allow a more contained experience to be worked on, articulated, and providing of some comfort to project staff whose psychological ends have become frayed within their project experience. I return to this issue of containment as a vehicle for understanding in the final chapter of the thesis. Suffice to say here in discussing the research approach, the “post field” activity, the extended aspect of the “extended case study”, the further reading, research, and discussion with supervisors, has provided some of the containment which has allowed the thesis to be developed.

4.7 The Effects of Power

While I have argued for the benefits of what Burawoy (among others) names as reflexive research, for its strength arising from the engagement with issues in their context over time, allowing the researcher to be part of, while researching, the dynamics as they unfold, there are also greater research dangers in this approach as well, dangers which arise from what Burawoy (1998) calls the “effects of power”. Given that my research role was more toward the participant
end of the participant observer continuum, it was probable that I would struggle with “effects of power”. While I can now write about this time as a phase I have passed through, there were times when it was possible that the difficulties arising from the role conflict, in part arising from the effects of power, may well have brought the research process to an end, and resulted in a failure to complete the studies.

Burawoy (1998) holds that the processes of intervention, process, structuration and reconstruction, are threatened by the power effects of domination, silencing, objectification, and normalization (p.23). Burawoy believes that while these forces limit the operation of reflexive principles, they do not provide a reason for abandoning the method. These four processes are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

4.7.1 Domination and the loss of ‘evaluative space’

While Burawoy doesn’t specifically define domination, it is clear from his text that he uses the word in its ordinary meaning taken from the latin root of ‘dominare’, to rule or govern. I will use the word in the sense of a ‘commanding influence over’ (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 2002). The researcher, says Burawoy, cannot avoid domination, both dominating and being dominated. Perhaps the most explicit use of domination I experienced early in my field work, was the ruling which had been made by the Senior Executive to make evaluation a compulsory aspect of project management. I don’t know if this decision was made with the encouragement of the leader of the Evaluation Unit or not. I argue in chapter 7, that examining some of the forces outside the Department helps us understand what might have led to the Department making evaluation compulsory. Once something is made compulsory, coercive efforts are required for its maintenance and implementation. Smith and Corse (1986) refer to an “overbounded situation”, which in their terms arises when a consultation (in my case, evaluation coordination) is imposed on parts within a system – ie, certain parts of the system are required to participate. In such a circumstance, “the consultation will be limited by the dynamics of implied coercion” (p. 256). I argue in the thesis that the Departmental obligation on its projects gradually facilitated the dominance of the “routinization” of evaluation as an organizational function (Dahler-Larsen, 2000), which led to a compromised form of evaluation.

Burawoy (1998) sees domination as multifaceted, and unavoidable. At the point of entry to the field, I was already implicated in what could be called the relations of domination, although I am sure the Department would recoil at the use of the word domination as a term which in part characterized their relationship either with their staff, or the clients of their programs. I see that I
was implicated by the terms of the initial entry agreements in which there were no formal
discussions or agreements either with project staff or project clients, thus leaving me fully
exposed to the demands of the performative North-South axis. Burawoy notes that even though
relations of domination may not be as blatant as they were “in the raw racial and class order of
the Zambian copperbelt [Burawoy’s field of study], they are nevertheless always there to render
our knowledge partial” (p.23).

Part of the experience of the word to dominate, suggests a diminution of ‘available space’ around
the nonnegotiable ruling, or action, space which might allow room to move, to question, to
reframe. The danger for the research role immersed in organizational life, is that it may prove
too difficult for the role to maintain its own space, to maintain its marginality, its occupying of
an ‘in between’ status. Lofland (1971) argues that it is this marginality which is the vantage
point which brings forth its contribution to understanding, its creative insight. “The
ethnographer needs to be intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness; and in overt
participant observation, socially he or she will be usually poised between stranger and friend”
(p.97). This loss of space was the most serious problem I faced as a researcher, even though for
me it was only temporary, and also hard to pinpoint in time or space, as it was also incremental
and variable.

It was through the painful experience of succumbing to the pressure to depict the project in a
“sanitized” light that I learnt of the strength of these systemic pressures. It was the extent of these
pressures, their nature and origins, which faced me as the major task for theorizing. In this
“existential” sense, I had to use my own emotional experience of domination as data, to try and
understand the enormity of what I ultimately came to see as the self defeating Departmental
efforts to maintain a façade of control in the face of the highly complex and turbulent
environment in which it was operating. It was self defeating at a Departmental level, and also on
the personal level.

I referred earlier to the concept of role strain. The effects of domination made the role strain
particularly acute. Bogdan and Taylor (1984) advise researchers to stay away from settings in
which they have a direct personal or professional stake. A large source of my role tension
between the role of evaluation coordinator, and researcher, I saw as arising from having a
professional stake, as I had expectations of myself in the “work” role, the role of evaluation
coordinator. One key professional expectation I had of myself, unrealistic as I now see this
expectation to have been, was that I felt responsible for bringing about, or trying to bring about,
dialogue between the parties in the project, much as Gustavsen (2004) cites Claussen’s description of the role of action researcher in workplace studies in Scandinavia:

*Research [I would insert ‘evaluation’ here in Claussen’s definition, to convey my intended meaning here] acts as a third party in balancing interests against each other; it acts as organiser of discourse arenas, as a source of knowledge and information, as a resource to be drawn upon in performing analyses, and more (Gustavsen, 2004, p.173, citing Claussen, 2003).*

While these research tasks are more clearly enunciated in the practice of action research than they are in evaluation practice, (for example, Kemmis sets out detailed processes), there is an implicit requirement in evaluation: if the evaluation presence is the means through which the views of multiple parties are elicited, then there is a concomitant responsibility to balance those interests against each other. It was particularly the task of balancing interests which I was unable to bring about. As time has passed, and I have widened my field of understanding of the systemic forces operating in the environment, I now judge myself, and others, less harshly. The vulnerability of the research role in the face of these forces makes this choice of research approach a challenging one. This sort of challenge could well be added to the detailing of research “dangers in the field” as offered by Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, (2000).

In addition to advising researchers to stay away from areas where one has a personal stake, Bogdan and Taylor (1984) also advise that it is desirable to avoid making judgements. This was not something I could avoid in this research setting, as I have noted above, given the evaluative aspect of the Evaluation Coordinator role. Part of my role was to seek and elicit multiple points of view, and to speak up if these voices were thwarted.

Bogdan and Taylor (1984) describe the difficulty for them as researchers in keeping their own advice about refraining from making judgments. One of the authors had been involved in a study of the conditions of care in an institution, which looked after severely mentally disabled residents. In this institution there were many examples of abuse by the attendants.

The observer was always careful to ask questions that would not intimidate the attendants or challenge their perspectives: “Does he always give you problems?” “How long do you have to keep him in there?” There is no doubt that if he had asked questions requiring the attendants to justify their actions – “How often do you let them out?” “What’s the institution’s policy on restraint?” – they would have frozen him out (p. 49).
There was no way I could avoid what Van Maanen noted when he said that any form of sustained questioning implied evaluation (Van Maanen, cited by Bogdan and Taylor, 1984). There were times when I could not desist from this approach, given the necessity, given my interpretation of my side of the ‘deal’, to give the evaluation coordinator role a higher priority than that of researcher. Also, evaluation, and its implementation, was what I was interested in, and there was no way to disguise my concerns when issues arose which I felt compromised what I expected of myself in the evaluation coordinator’s role.

There were times when the domination was more subtle. Toward the end of the project, in my effort to explore some past history, I was frozen out by senior members of the hierarchy. While this comment is supposition, I think it is highly likely that I would not have received credible responses to my further questions if I had persisted to seek information on certain occurrences within the project, from the more senior members of the Department. Ball (1994) noted that he discovered early on that rather than try to interview Ministers in office, it was more productive to concentrate on those who have left office, given their likelihood to feel freer to trade inside information.

The “cross currents and conflicts” (Douglas, 1976, p.33) of the fieldwork were such that the critical reflection which was needed to come to some understanding of the case dynamics required what Deetz and Kersten (1983) refer to as “freedom from existing systems of domination and communication distortion” (p.167). It took some considerable time after the end of the fieldwork, for me to find that space.

### 4.7.2 Silencing

Burawoy (1998) discusses silencing as a mechanism of the ruling ideology in which it presents the interests of the dominant class as the interests of all. To counteract this tendency, Burawoy describes the research task of registering “discordant voices” as the “meat and potato of fieldwork” (p.23). I could not achieve this in the role of evaluation coordinator, and it has been only in the research role that I have been able to explore the factors that required the silencing of discordant voices. These voices included my own voice at times, as well as the voices of some of the program clients. Why it should have been necessary to suppress discordant voices demonstrates particular tensions in public sector work.
There was another form of silence what I might call an existential silence, in the form of the exclusion of the female voice within the Department, within the Project, and within the producer group. As one (very) senior female member of the Department said during a meeting of Departmental Evaluation staff with visiting evaluation researchers, gender was a word seldom used in the Department. She commented that at those times when it was mouthed, the discomfort on the faces of the (mostly male) senior members of the Department was pronounced. The maleness of the bureaucracy in this domain is something on which there is ample research evidence (Liepins, 2000).

4.7.3 Objectification

Burawoy’s (1998) concept of objectification is a process which is an inevitable part of the methodological device of taking voices from the situations in which they occur, and examining their meaning in the context of wider social processes. It is what I have had to do for the purposes of the thesis, to analyse the microprocesses I was engaged with, to render them meaningful in another context. The research act itself has been a form of structuration, which Burawoy sees as locating social processes in the context of their external determination (p.23). The idea of structuration, discussed earlier, is hard to conceptually and metaphorically picture, but it pertains to the end result, however fleetingly felt or perceived, of the relational interaction of both human agency and social structure in relationship with each other. As Gauntlett explains Giddens, it is in the repetition of the acts of individual agents that structure is produced (Gauntlett, 2002). The final Project Report produced one set of objectifications, this thesis another.

4.7.4 Normalization

Burawoy’s (1998) concern, in highlighting the issue of normalization, is the inevitable fashioning that goes on in constructing complex situations to fit a theory, and also tailoring theory to fit a case. I think he is asking us to be mindful of these processes, and the way in which reducing human situations to categories can allow for further investigation, evaluation, and control. These shaping processes are both hard to trace, and are of particular importance in performative climates, where there is pressure for particular outcomes.

In many respects, the subjugation of the MI program theory to a ‘technology transfer’ mode of program intervention, and captured in the framework of a GTL, is an apt example of normalization in this case study. The GTL form of program logic, as I will explain further in chapter 6, takes as its basis the perspective that the program clients are recipients in an educative
process in which they are taught new skills or exposed to new knowledge, with the presumption that by adopting this new knowledge, they will change their practice, and the value of their product will be enhanced. These outcomes come about by the program staff imparting the technology which brings about this change. This way of thinking shapes and attempts to normalize and therefore not question, these predictable steps and logic. It strengthens the neo-liberal view of how progress is defined, and leaves outside the frame of reference, different sorts of subjugated knowledge. These subjugated knowledges are typically the contested aspects of program implementation, the rumblings from ‘below’ or ‘outside’ the GTL, from those who the program is designed to be serving.

4.8 The warrant for the research findings.

In this disentangling of an evaluation process from an unremittingly complex program with ambiguous outcomes, I try to honour three warrants. The first claim is that the research offers an account which arises from circumstances experienced over time. The longitudinal nature of the research will evoke recognition in the reader. The second claim or warrant is that the research is topical. The third is that it represents a systematic analysis of phenomenon that is of increasing relevance to evaluation practice, but which so far has been insufficiently researched and is notable in its absence from the published literature.

Firstly, to study a topic within its own context, over an extended period of time, in such a way that the reader can identify with the circumstances of the case, is an approach which is lacking in the evaluation field (Rogers, 1996). I have aimed to achieve this with the extent of my involvement, which I believe brings with it a recognition from the reader of what Geertz calls “being there” (Geertz, 1983, cited by Scott, 1989, p.47). This claim is similar to that made by Stake (1995) that to be seen as relevant, case studies they must be able to provide vicarious experience, through knowledge of the particular. Another word for this warrant is that of “verisimilitude”(Guba and Lincoln, 1998). Morgan (1993) speaks of “resonance” to describe this.

My second claim is that the phenomenon I have set out to describe is ‘topical’ in the sense of the word used by Lofland and Lofland (1984). In the countless conversations I have had about my research with people who have either conducted or experienced evaluation, one response from several people is that what I am writing about speaks to their experience. The link between the evaluation function and the ‘organizational communication’ function is familiar to many. Other responses indicate that for some evaluators, the conversation is uncomfortable, eliciting responses which suggest a desire to rather hurriedly terminate the conversation, wanting to
‘pigeonhole’ my experience as something unique to either me, or to the organization in which I carried out the research. It is their lack of engagement which make me want to take up the challenge of their objections.

My third claim for the research is that it entered waters which have not been well charted in the evaluation literature. The thesis explores the ‘dark side’ of evaluation. It is often said that the cupboard is bare when we look for cases which examine bad practice, or bad consequences of good practice, or cases which, from their micro detail, tell us something about the wider forces in the current society in which we live. It is my hope that I have put some of the broader social, political and economic structures under scrutiny in the thesis. In taking this line, I am in agreement with the words of a Rabbi, (source unknown) who wrote about the importance of talking about the problems in the fields of practice in which we are engaged, particularly with those who are yet to enter those fields, as without these discussions, we are sending people into the field with one hand tied behind their backs.

4.9 Study limitations

Immersion in a program brings with it strengths and limitations. Many scholars note that there are seldom clear cut cases of right and wrong. This thesis has certainly borne that out. There are several strands of enquiry that the thesis was not able to explore. It is hoped that future students may find ways to develop some of the missing threads.

It may be a paradox that one of the strengths of the study, its immersed nature in a case as actually experienced, rather than relying on reports of how individuals might have liked it to have been experienced, is also its weakness. One of the implications of my close association with the MI project was that when the project finished, so too did my access to ongoing data. My data from the “post project” period is limited, although what I have learnt about this period through conversations with some project staff and others associated with the Department, several of the concerns I have raised in this thesis have been confirmed. While fieldwork has to end somewhere, I cite this as a limitation.

It was only in my research role that I could raise the voices of diversity which had been minimized. However in this role, I could not explore them any further while within the MI project and from within the evaluation coordinator’s role. After I had completed the brief period of paid work with the Department toward the end of the project, during which I suspended my student role, I attempted to reposition myself only as a researcher, in the more marginal role, one less immersed in the project activities due to the cessation of the evaluation coordinator’s role. I
sought an interview with a leading producer, which I had anticipated would be one of several interviews I would conduct with key parties, since my data had, to that point, been gathered through participant observation.

I found that by the time I made this approach, some months after the formal end of the MI project, that the demeanour of this producer had changed. His first question was whether he would be paid for the interview. This was uncharacteristic of this man, in my previous dealings with him. My interpretation of his response was that he was out of patience with the Department, a response I felt he was generalizing to me. I felt his good will was spent, and I discontinued with the aim of following up other producers. This left some of my evidence uncorroborated, but I could not rationalise continuing with the research under these circumstances. The evaluation coordinator’s role had, during the course of the project, contaminated the research role.

This left me having to draw some of my own conclusions about the possible ongoing effects of the producers’ project experience of lacking an adequate mechanism for having their views put, heard and responded to in an appropriate and timely manner. This was my observation during the project, but I am aware that it may be that the producers had some of their own mechanisms which operated outside of the project altogether. However, the literature suggests that methods and processes of what constitutes adequate consultation between government and producers are contentious issues (Higgins and Lockie, 2001; SC 10).

Another implication of my close association with the project, was that I was not able to represent with more rounded detail the perspectives of those senior members of the Department who were drawn into having to enact the wider systemic demands of image management. This is a deficit of the thesis, and came about not only due to a factor that Van Maanen (1982) among others, has highlighted, that the upper echelons of organizations are difficult to infiltrate, but also due to the fact that the importance of the role of the higher echelons of the Department was itself an emergent property of the project dynamic, and hence the research, and not a situation I set out to address in my research design.

A related implication of finishing the fieldwork when I did was that I have not discussed the study findings with the Department in question. This is problematic on the grounds of what the literature refers to as “member checks” (Swanborn, 1996; Boud and Walker, 1990). While I raise this further in Section 4.9 below on Ethics, I emphasize it here also in relation to the study limitations.
In a very real sense, there are at least five distinct groupings of people who are talked about in the research: senior Departmental officers, middle level Departmental management, project staff, project clients, and myself as evaluation coordinator and researcher. Providing feedback to the Department, of the sort which might be envisaged in the idea of member checks, was unworkable. The key reasons for this were that the project had finished, was not successful in receiving ongoing funding, and key parties had dispersed. The Chairman of the MI Advisory Committee had died, and the Project Manager’s contract had terminated and he had left the Department. Most importantly of all, and in keeping with some of the literature on case study research, I took considerable time to reach my conclusions (Walker, 1978, cited by Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2002, p.268). This length of time was prohibitive to the chances of an ongoing conversation, even if the Department was asking for it.

At the end of the MI project, members of the Evaluation Working Group with whom I had worked closely during the project period, asked the leader of the Evaluation Unit, on at least two occasions, if she would assist with a “de-brief”. I was to be involved in this, although I was not taking the lead in making this request. The request was not taken up.

I have maintained a friendship with two members of the Project Team, one of whom was my colleague in the Evaluation Working Group. As time passes, and we discuss my findings, should he be interested, I will be guided by him as to the content of conversations which touch on our shared experience of the MI project.

4.10 Research ethics

In this section I discuss two key ethical concerns I confronted in the research. The first concern was around the limitations of informed consent in qualitative research of this sort. The second, related concern is the identifiability of individuals in the thesis. I then set out the decisions I have taken in writing and presenting the thesis, arising from these concerns. I regard these decisions as adequate, rather than ideal.

4.10.1 Informed consent – some limitations

Earlier in this section I set out some of the complexities flowing from a research process that is inherently emergent. A major aspect of these complexities lie in the ethical domain.
University research with human subjects is governed by guidelines issued under the authority of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) of Australia. The presumed research paradigm is one where consent is sought at the outset of the research.

There are particular limitations to the idea of informed consent in this presumed research paradigm, when it comes to ethnographically oriented research. This sort of research does not follow the “experimenter-subject” model on which many discussions of informed consent are based. It is often not feasible for ethnographically oriented research to seek consent to an agreement, which can be specified clearly enough and which holds constant enough for the duration of the research.

The approval for my research from the University Institutional ethics committee focused particularly on seeking signed consent for taped interviews. While I had thought I would be carrying out such interviews, in the event I did not. As I have already noted, my research role was undertaken while executing certain tasks which were part of an activity, being evaluation, which senior management of the Department had deemed a required activity. Therefore I was not asking staff or management to carry out additional activities due to my research.

I know of one Australian University (Tripp, 1998) where students doing ethnographically oriented research are encouraged to regard consent as an ongoing matter to be negotiated as research circumstances change. However the norm remains the one off ‘up front’ consent arrangement. However, while an ongoing process of consent group is not formally required, it remains that the researcher has ongoing ethical responsibilities, beyond those formally required by ethics committees.

Researchers hold divergent views about the requirements for informed consent in relation to certain aspects of qualitative research. Punch (1986) notes for example, that in a large organization, “engaged in constant interaction with a considerable number of clients”, it is physically impossible to seek consent from everyone, and seeking it “will kill many a research project stone dead” (p. 36). Rainwater and Pittman (1967), who also hold that there are limitations to the idea of ‘informed consent’, think special exemptions apply to those in public office – that those in public roles do not have the right to refuse to be researched, and therefore do not need to be asked for their consent.

I have already noted in discussing “the researcher’s deal” (section 4.5.1) that the senior management were more interested in what my availability could offer the project, rather than
questioning my topic or the process I would follow to pursue my research, something I regarded as quite normal. However, I acted in such a way as to maintain the reminder that I was a student. At the commencement of my research, when I thought the MI project team were to be the key participants, I elicited their questions and concerns about the research. My student status for most of the research period served as a constant reminder of my research role. None of my activities was covert. I participated in a well-attended Departmental seminar with other higher degree research students within the Division. So while I was not formally seeking informed consent from all those I came into contact with in the course of the project, I always took the opportunity to advise that I was a full time student and was studying evaluation as an organizational activity. From time to time, members of the MI project team, in what I heard as kind concern, would say that they hoped I could find something to write about for my thesis, given the difficulties in the project as they were experiencing it, and given their awareness of the difficulty I was experiencing in my role as evaluation coordinator.

Much of the ethics discourse is focused on the researcher in relation to their presence in interaction with participants. However, I came to agree with Wax (1982), that it is after the field work finishes that the key ethical issues in ethnographic research arise. Under “study limitations”, I have already mentioned that I could not engage ‘research participants in “member checks.” But the issue is bigger than the ability or not to carry out member checks. The bigger issue is encountered when a research process in which one’s final conclusions are formed well after the contact with participants is concluded.

Bogdan and Taylor (1984) note that ethically challenging situations are experienced more frequently than they are reported by researchers. For them, participant observation often poses morally and ethically problematic situations that are irresolvable. For me in this research, one major irresolvable situation was that of identifiability.

4.10.2 The question of identifiability

While I have cited several reasons that account for some of the difficulties in case study research around informed consent, these difficulties do not absolve me from the ethical concerns which I am required to address. If anything, they heighten the difficulties.

For Wax (1982) the key ethical issues in ethnographic research are faced at the time of publication. How do I represent the project participants in the thesis? Would unrestricted publication of this research, give rise to harm to any of the participants? What would invoke the
accusation that something I had published could cause “embarrassment or distress to the people studied?” (Becker, 1964, p.284).

Before I go on to explain what course of action I have decided on, I will set out three issues:

- the acknowledgement of the unavoidability of some discomfort in qualitative research of this sort
- to whom could harm be done?
- the establishment of some criteria on which I might judge the question of harm

In relation to the issue of the unavoidability of discomfort in research, Becker (1964) reminds us some people are deflated by seeing their world, and things they hold to be important, cast in a different light, particularly if that is not a favourable light. On the other side of the coin Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest we question what is sometimes presumed will be a negative response to research results; often this perception is minimal or non-existent. How much discomfort would be experienced by those who may see themselves in this thesis remains unknown and unknowable.

The second issue is: to whom could harm be done?

I think the participants who could take exception to the findings, are the senior managers who are portrayed as suppressing project conflict, for what could be taken to be their own gain; gain in the sense of either avoiding ‘losing face’ (Goffman, 1973) or avoiding facing the conflict. While I go to considerable lengths to emphasize that I discuss individual behaviour of participants as responses to the often unreasonable and unworkable demands and tensions within the system in which they are working, this emphasis may be overlooked by the individuals concerned. It is also possible that senior managers could be criticized for their management of the development of the Supply Structure company. While I am critical of how this was managed by the Department, I attribute the pressures the Department was acting under in some ways as outside of their control. As Taylor (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984) says of his work in which he observed abuse in residential care settings, these were not as much “bad people” as “good people”, or at least as good as most of us, in a “bad place”. The nature of the “bad place” is further described in the thesis, which sets out to explain the interplay between the organizational context, and a range behaviours which became organizationally, or systemically, induced.

Being concerned about the responses of more senior members of the Department will be seen by some as giving greater weight to those who already hold considerable power in the lives of
individuals. In fact it is one of Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1995) recommendations about ethnographic research, that one way we can redress some of the imbalances in research, is that we should put more research effort into studying the powerful (p.275). I am not maintaining that the producers were by contrast powerless, but I believe I have more than sufficient evidence that they had little actual authority, both with regard to the way in which the project developed, and at the end in relation to what was published about their endeavours. The Department decided how it wished to portray the MI project, its participants, and its achievements. The producers’ concerns, particular the more critical ones, are invisible. That aside, I remained concerned when writing up the thesis, about possible harm to this group of senior managers.

The third issue then has to do with how I might examine the question of possible harm. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) give me some guidance here. They note that researchers must weigh the importance and contribution of their research against the chances and scale of any harm that is likely to be caused. We need to weigh the likelihood of harm, against

the values of honesty and fairness, against any infringement of privacy involved, and against any likely consequences for themselves and other researchers. But there will be conflicting indications, difficult judgments and probably disagreements. Ethical issues are not matters on which simple and consensual decisions can always be made. It is our view however, that the most effective strategies for pursuing research should be adopted unless there is clear evidence that these are ethically unacceptable. In other words, indeterminacy and uncertainty should for the most part be resolved by ethnographers in favour of the interests of research, since that is their primary task (p. 285)

My response to these dilemmas has been mixed, and there are no clear cut answers. I do not want to cause harm or unnecessary embarrassment, but neither do I want to neutralize my thesis to the point that it risks not demonstrating coherence and integrity in its arguments due to excessive modification of the context.

While Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) give some overall pointers as to how we might consider the likelihood of harm, Schwandt (1997c) reminds us that moral decisions are never tidy and they almost always leave moral remainders. How did I assess the risk of harm in this case?

The issue of intention is also relevant here. I did not seek to uncover material that could be seen as harmful if recounted. This material arose in the course of day-to-day events within the project
– that is, inadvertently. I also did not engage in any deceit to uncover any of the material I have put forward in this thesis.

However, ‘trust in government’ is a newsworthy topic (Reed and Bunsden, 2002). Homans (1991) makes the point that the media latch onto issues which could be construed as going to the honesty of public servants, such as teachers or local government officers, though he notes this is a level of perusal seldom given to theses (p.157). However, concerns about the credibility of government are particularly rife in Australia. At one community meeting I attended in the period of the research, one angry rural Shire President (the chair of a rural local government body) said that he was “sick of giving bottom up feedback to top down government programs”. Other literature points to the increasing cynicism in the minds of some rural people in relation to government intervention (Higgins & Lockie, 2001; Herbert-Cheshire, 2000). This climate may increase the risk of having the findings used in a way that wasn’t intended, which could bring harm to individuals if identified. On the other hand, given the fast pace at which the world, and the public service with it, is moving, I think the risk of harm to individual persons is minimal. I note the irony in using the instability of public sector life, the ‘projectification’ of work environments, the high turnover of staff, and the ‘short termism’ of decision-making, as factors I would take into account in arguing that risk of harm to individuals is lessened in this environment.

In the next section below I set out the decisions I have made in relation to the publication of the thesis, which I believe will address these possible harms.

4.10.3 Decisions in relation to thesis publication

In relation to publication of the thesis, I have therefore made the following decisions.

(a) Restricting accessibility of the thesis.

The policy for Higher Degree by Research allows for restriction of access to a thesis for a period of up to three years from its receipt by the University, by reasons of commercial confidentiality or industrial security.

While at one level such a move contradicts the “right to know”, itself another ethical principle, I think it is wise to seek the restriction to the thesis that such an embargo would allow. By the time another three years have passed, it will be seven years from the completion of the MI project. As I have been at pains to point out in the thesis, the purpose of the thesis is to explain the
phenomena I experienced as creating some barriers to the implementation of program evaluation, and was not intending to evaluate any individuals.

(b) De-identifying individuals and the Department

I have de-identified the case, which has been at some cost to the coherence of the story. I have anonymised the industry group, to a ‘generic product’. Where certain statements from individuals might be seen to portray them in a negative light, where possible I have made it so that such statements could be attributed to one of a number of individuals (Homans, 1991). While I have felt it necessary to mask the data in this way, I recognize that this reduces the prospect of the findings being accessible for others to check and dispute.

The issues of identifiability of individuals and of the Department are closely linked, so I have also suppressed the public availability of any citations that may identify the Department. Not naming the Department is not a serious drawback, as I believe the findings do have applicability to the public sector in general. It is a sector under enormous pressure from the demands of market inspired ‘New Public Management’, yet it is a critically important sector for its responsibility, as some scholars would hold (e.g., Hoggett, 2003), to strengthen the social fabric of our society by accommodating and facilitating difference and conflict.

There is also the issue of the identifiability of this University. There are difficult issues to be faced by Universities in this current climate of the requirement on staff to be economically self sufficient, and the need to pursue contracted research with industry bodies. In this sense the University has sensitivities it may not have been so wary of in previous times. Homans (1991) holds that in the present economic climate, “it takes a courageous moral stance to resist funding” on the basis of principles of government control over results (p.37). Several evaluation researchers are writing now about issues of control by government and limitations on academic freedom (Kusher, 2005). I discuss this further in the final chapter of the thesis. I have not attempted to deidentify the University.

4.10.4 Intellectual responsibility to the field

It is due to the possibility that ethnographic research has some exploitative potential, that Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) specifically recommend that researchers “give back” something to those researched (p.275). This idea is linked to that of reparation, a theme that arises particularly in the systems psychodynamics literature (Hirschhorn, 1988).
I think the idea of reparation is implicit in Bogdan and Taylor’s (1984) statement that “what you learn through your research, and what you do with your findings may at least partially absolve you from the moral responsibility for standing by” (p.73). While I believe the context for this statement is likely to have arisen particularly from Taylor’s work in institutions for mentally retarded people, where as a researcher he had to “stand by” while extreme incursions were made on the civil liberties of the residents by staff, the sentiment is revealing for me. It raises the possibility of acting in positive and affirming ways in other domains, ways which link to, or arise directly from the research experience, but which may have not been possible during the research.

My learning through the experience of this thesis development is already tangibly informing the paid work I am now doing as I finalize this thesis. This work, if I can manage to facilitate this within the research environment, will require the explicit eliciting of the differing perspectives of the multiple stakeholders, and an exploration of possibility of the evaluation presence to contribute to the capacity of both the community and the public sector agencies to conceptualise, organize and interpret their local knowledge to each other. I also intend to share my insights and offer support to others (students and fellow researchers) who may find themselves embroiled in organizational dynamics in which they risk losing their footing as I did, even if only temporarily. The likelihood of difficulty for students straddling a research role while participating as role holders in organizations is likely to escalate, given the increase in industry based work as a site for higher degree research.

In some ways, I feel I have begun giving back to the field, albeit indirectly, even obtusely. I see this as a perspective more informed by principles of feminist research (Fonow & Cook, 1991). I participate in the governance of an NGO organization whose members represent those community voices which were so absent from the MI project and hence my study. While I also draw pleasure from many of the interactions I have in this discussion group, I am also quite consciously putting back some of my learning, without demonstrably linking these gestures to my sense of loss about the interactions between parties which I wasn’t able to promote during the project. Participation in this group also provides insights into the question of the ways in which women are excluded from discussions in public sector programs, or choose not to participate, given the assessment some women make of the unsatisfactory terms on which the discussions are held.

This experience leads me to affirm the need for adequate support structures at at least two levels in this work. One is for the evaluation practitioner, where a support structure is required for a
number of reasons. One is to assist in the task of what Boxer calls “holding steady”, in the case of “not knowing”, at least until the issues one is dealing with become clearer (Boxer, 2004, p.20). Another is to provide some ballast against the very strong prevailing forces in organizations, to become aligned with the dominant power structure. Support is also required both from the University and also within the workplace, for students who engage in an immersed field work experience, in which the opportunity for role confusion, and contamination of one role by another, is always present. I discuss in the last chapter, what some of the hallmarks of a ‘safe space’ for learning might be.

4.11 Role experience – sources of research data

4.11.1 Different system domains as data sources

To assist in setting out different sources of data I will use a framework put forward by Smith and Corse (1986) which they use to describe the three systems perspectives of the role of consultant. These systems perspectives are the process within the organization itself, processes arising from the researcher / evaluation coordinator intervention, and processes internal to this role, that is, *intrasubjective* processes. In adopting this framework, I modify it significantly, replacing the idea of “consultant” as used by Smith and Corse, with that of “evaluation coordinator/researcher” and use this framework to then point to the different opportunities I either created or took up, and, through these experiences, gradually develop my thesis. This modification of Smith and Corse, and its adaptation to my case, is set out in Figure 10 below.
**Figure 10** System outline of research experience, roles, and data sources

| 1 | Differing systemic levels | 2 | Examples of the sorts of processes and tasks to which I had access, was part of, or to which I contributed. The list in this column below can also be read as data sources | 3 | Examples of experiences in Evaluation role from which I drew data for Research role |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A: Processes within the Organization itself | One to one and group contact with Project Team leaders and team Involvement in and also observation of Project Team meetings Observation of MI Advisory Committee meetings Interviews with producers for evaluation report Observation of Supply Structure company meetings Observation of meetings of officers from different programs within the Department | Difficulty in arriving at a common view on project key “task” in MI project Change in authority relations within Project Different Departmental projects acting as “silos” Senior Departmental championing of Evaluation Program clients experienced by some as threatening |
| B: Evaluation Coordinator/Researcher processes (in descending order of degree of my participation) (Spradley, 1980) | Management of MI Evaluation Working Group Interaction with two other members of Evaluation Working Group Working on Evaluation Plan Carrying out interviews with staff and project clients Managing Market Research Contract Liaison with Department’s Evaluation Unit Participation in Evaluation training Observation of Economic Evaluation efforts Observation of addresses given by Senior Executive of Department, particularly focused on his views about Evaluation | Departmental anxiety about working with target group Political sensitivity about certain aspects of project leading to perceived necessity to suppress discussion My “geographic place” within project was at the staff level - implications for authority relations and perceived and actual allegiances |
| C: Within Evaluation Coordinator/Researcher processes | Evaluation and Researcher inner conflicts/ambivalences | Some identity with and partiality toward production background, country “life” Background identity of Social Work Presence of some expertise and experience in evaluation work No practice experience in the work role held by the staff in this project. |

### 4.11.2 Types of data collected

As my roles moved between the different system levels in column 1 of Figure 10 above, the ‘processes within the organization itself’, with the ‘evaluation coordinator/researcher’ processes”, and the ‘within evaluation coordinator/researcher processes’, so too do my data sources move between these different systems.

Observation end of the participant observer continuum

My first project experiences, on which I have drawn in the thesis, were my experiences of being able to be a fairly passive participant in the Departmental evaluation training courses. These
experiences provided me with the opportunity to see and hear how evaluation was portrayed to the Departmental staff, and gave me my first experience of hearing the Senior Executive convey to his staff the importance with which he regarded the evaluation role. One role I was asked to perform in one such training session was to assist the evaluation unit by keeping a written record of the interactions during training. I was not to know at the time that I would return to these detailed notes for further understanding of these early evaluation experiences. Much of chapter 7 addresses the Senior Executive’s influence in relation to evaluation practice within the Department.

Another set of experiences during the project in which I was more of an observer was when I attended what were called the ‘economic evaluation’ meetings, which I refer to in chapter 5. My role at these meetings, from within my evaluation coordinator’s duty, was to keep informed of the issues and the discussion, so as to report back to the MI project. Again, the importance of these meetings to my thinking did not crystallize until much later in my research.

Participant end of the participant observation continuum: documents and project experiences generated through the work

The data in Column 2 of Figure 10 above can also be read as a list of data sources. In addition to the events I participated in, and to people with whom I interacted, were the processes of generating the evaluation work itself. In reviewing and analyzing this work, I drew heavily on hundreds of emails, which were generated in the process of carrying out the evaluation work. Project team members, and also the members of the Evaluation Working Group, had to rely heavily on email as a major form of communication, as the MI project was a dispersed project, and the three of us who formed the Evaluation Working Group were separated by some hundreds of kilometres.

Triangulation for validity

The different roles from which I was able to observe the phenomenon that came to be the subject of this thesis, (the distortion experienced both during the project which impacted on the evaluation processes, and in the final stage of the project in the way the project story was told), acted as a form of triangulation of the data. Other vantage points, from which this procedure of triangulation was carried out, involved the combing of other official reports in this product industry, published reports by members of this Department, memos internal to the Department, which related both to evaluation processes and also to MI project detail, other forms of
correspondence, correspondence, contracts, and administrative files on matters such as the disbursement of project monies. These issues all served to assist my understanding of the broader perspectives on the setting.

I wrote 11 100-page fieldwork notebooks which contained both work details carried out in the evaluation coordinator’s role, and also my reflections over time. I transcribed the fieldwork notebook notes, and other descriptions of key events in “Atlas TI”, a qualitative software package, in which I then searched and researched until the key themes emerged, of patterned regularities (Wolcott, 2001). The issues that concerned me during the MI project remained constant. How I would grow to understand them became the themes which emerged some time after the end of the fieldwork. The software package served as a tool for me to locate key transcripts of data, after the themes emerged, rather than itself forming the basis of the generation of those themes. A key part of this process has been my own progressive subjectivity – by which I mean the ways in which my own thinking and theoretical formulations have changed and evolved.

Unsolicited accounts

Much of my data arises from what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) refer to as unsolicited accounts. Many ethnographers emphasize that not all insider accounts are produced by informants responding to researcher’s question. Accounts can be given between those who are part of the setting for study – from one worker to another, for example, and can also be given unsolicited to the participant observer. I typically made notes of these interactions, either at the time they were occurring, a task which was made somewhat easier by the fact that a considerable amount of the work was carried out through the telephone. For those face to face unsolicited occurrences, when it was not appropriate to take notes, I would make notes in my field work note books as close to the time of the interaction as was possible.

Hammersley and Atkinson note that all human behaviour has an expressive dimension, but it is the expressive power of language, which in the main provides the most important resource for accounts. A crucial feature of language is its capacity to present descriptions, explanations and evaluations of an almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world, including itself. It is the norm in every day life to find that people continually provide linguistic accounts to one another, including renditions of news, and making attributions of others’ motives, character, and abilities.
Such talk occurs most notably when some kind of misalignment is perceived between values, rules or normal expectation and the actual course of events (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, citing Hewitt and Stokes, 1976). The resulting accounts, which individuals give to each other, may be concerned with remedying the discrepancy, or with finding some explanation for it.

The MI case study is redolent with this sort of descriptive material, given the range of confronting experiences – the novelty of the sort of intervention project staff were to implement, how this sort of project contained elements of new practices for them, and cast them in a different light in the eyes of some producers, the challenge of linking producers with overseas processors, the political risks for the Department in getting ‘closer to the market’ than some deemed wise, and the dilemmas posed during the formation of the Supply Structure company.

In addition to, or paralleling, the struggle which individual project team members had in making sense of their difficult role, the Evaluation Working Group similarly went through a process of trying to understand and grasp a role we thought we could take up, and then dealing with the struggle as we gradually came to realize that there was going to be a considerable disparity between the role as we had initially conceived, and the role senior project managers gradually moved us toward as the project unfolded.

Giving accounts, staff to each other, and Evaluation Working Group members to each other, therefore became a source of direct information about the setting, and provided, as I became clearer about what had happened to us all, insight into the organizational dynamics which were operating for project team members, members of the Evaluation Working Group, as well as for the Department. My research site was rich in this sort of data, as was the staff room in Hammersley’s studies with teachers, where he noted how they gave accounts of their work, their actions, and also local and national political events (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p 127, citing the work of Hammersley, 1980, 1981, 1991b).

4.12 Summary

I have used Burawoy’s (1998) extended case method as a framework for examining the strengths and dangers of a participant observation approach to research. Among the strengths of the extended case study approach are its approach to examine what actually happens in one’s fields of interest, rather than what might or should happen. While attracted to the idea of ‘reciprocity as a field technique’, the more informal approach in accessing the field in this way left me rather exposed when things turned sour, and I needed to use extended time after the field work in the
reconstruction phase of Burawoy’s case method, in coming to an understanding of the key dynamics I had experienced. I use the concept of role strain to conceptualise these tensions. In this chapter I have drawn attention to where and in what ways, these effects impacted on the research process, and the quality of the data. They both enhanced, and diminished its quality.

I argue that I have a significant warrant for the research findings, given the prevalence of evaluation as an organizational function, with the attendant dangers this heralds for the work and relationships typically encountered in the performative East West axis of organizational life. I also elaborate on the limitations of the study, including the lack of perspectives of women as project subjects, and being unable to follow up producers at the end of the project, for verification of their reactions to the Department’s actions in the project. I was similarly unable to document the perspectives of the senior members of the project and the Department, having to rely on my observations and analysis made in the course of the fieldwork, and reanalysis in the reconstruction period. I have also discussed in this chapter the limitations to the idea of informed consent in an emergent project, and have documented the decisions I have taken to de-identify the project and embargo the thesis due to concerns about identifiability.

While acknowledging the limitations, I have also highlighted the strength of the thesis in the breadth and depth of the scope of contexts and dynamics addressed in the analysis, and in its resonance for the ongoing performative demands in public sector agencies.

In move now to chapter 5, in which I examine the case detail of the conflicting and ultimately polarizing tendencies of a system under duress – a system, as the two chapters following chapter 5 will then show, in which only certain interests could be voiced.
Chapter 5 A stressed project environment

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 of the thesis set out the very specific challenges of the MI project: it was a high risk, high stakes, innovative, contested project. Some of the tensions included:

- Was the industry in which the MI project was being delivered experiencing market failure, in which case the government role was not warranted, or was there an appropriate market development role for government?
- Were the MI project aims clear or contested?
- Was the project better classed as a mainstream project, or was it innovative and exploratory?
- Was this public sector environment one of the slow public service “of old”, or the new entrepreneurial public service?
- Could the current project management determine the use of project funds, or were they constrained by previous departmental decision makers?
- Was there any legitimate role for project clients in project decision making, or was total control needing to be in the hands of the Department?
- Was the project best seen as governed by local management, as aspired to in NPM, or was the management predominantly centralist?
- Who were the beneficiaries of the project, the producers who participated, or all potential producers in this product group
- What was the purpose for evaluation – to assist with exploratory, formative evaluation on incremental project processes, or was it to assist in the public justification of a success story?

Chapter 3 of the thesis lays the theoretical basis for the development of the ideas which give insight into the anxiety which can be triggered by circumstances which are both unpredictable and emergent in nature. Circumstances such as these, with inherent uncertainty and ambiguity, give rise to what Chattopadhyay and Malhotra (1991) refer to as the “phantasy need” for control, phantasy because it is a need which cannot be met. The anxieties which proliferate in contradictory, capricious environments proliferate in such a way that the reality is obscured.

Part of the controlling behaviour which becomes manifest in these environments is evident by the emphasis on instrumental aspects of project life as the dominant approach to understanding.
Object Relations theory suggests that certain individual, group and system properties are necessary to facilitate a readiness and a capacity to see the wider whole, and the connectedness of things. Such properties, at both the individual level and the organizational level, include a capacity to tolerate strong feelings, to live with ambivalence, to have a reasonable sense of ‘self’ and ‘other’, readiness to explore and test reality, a capacity to feel and demonstrate empathy, and to work creatively in the spaces made available, or seeing the need to engineer the availability of the spaces. Where these “conditions” are routinely unable to germinate or be sustained, the converse is created – strong feelings cannot be tolerated, ambivalence is too threatening, a sense of ‘self’ and ‘other’ becomes distorted, reality is not tested, empathy is diminished, and what spaces may exist for exploration of ideas are closed off. The vignettes in chapters 5, 6 and 7 all provide clear examples of these states.

These tensions played themselves out within the project environment, in particular ways, with particular consequences. I argue that these tensions are present in everyday group relations even in projects which may not be as risky or contentious as the MI project. In a supportive environment, resolution of these dilemmas can be sought in a way that they can be held and addressed while attempts are made to understand them and respond collectively to them. In unsupportive environments, these dilemmas are responded to as “part objects” (Klein, 1959) as if the part can stand for the whole. Treating elements of the whole in this way aggrandises some, and obscures others from sight. This was so in this case. While I regard these responses as offering some means of self protection for the organization in the face of anxiety, ironically, while attempting to make the uncertain more manageable, they act to make it more unstable, by further weakening the relationships which form the basis of the work tasks. Among such maladaptive responses experienced in the project, were

- Blaming behaviour toward producers and staff
- Avoidance of engagement with producers as a group, while attempting to project an image of competent performance
- Collusive purposeful obscuring of responsibility for actions taken in the past and present
- A reification of managerial approaches to the work, including a vigorous emphasis on quantifiable results, which pushed away a focus on relationships between the parties concerned
5.2 Chapter 5 - key events and processes

For some time I had considerable difficulty setting out the “key events” in the case, and could not for some time conceptualize this difficulty. I finally came to understand that part of the difficulty was what Geertz calls the “life trailing nature of consciousness” (Geertz, 1995, p.19). It was Weick’s writing which first crystallized my understanding of this idea. He talks of the asymmetry in understanding in the fact that we can only grasp and articulate what mattered previously, rather than “what matters or will matter” (Weick, 2002). He points to Kierkegaard’s journal entry, (Gardiner, 1998, cited in Weick, 2002): “It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards”.

“Understanding backwards” is certainly a way of describing my research process. Added to this was that much of what I draw on for evidence, has to do with processes, just as the meaning I draw from thus dynamics as projection of blame onto others, as much as it has to do with key events, such as the act of the Department severing contact with the Supply Structure company.

However, despite these conceptual difficulties, I set out below in Figure 11 an outline of how I decided to frame the interactive effects of process and event. Following this summary, I then set out a number of explanatory vignettes. In presenting the accounts, the reader is reminded that “Year 1” denotes the first year of the MI project. Year 2 was my first year of association with the project.
In discussing the flaws in the fabric of the project, the impact of these processes on the evaluation task becomes more evident. In fact, the evaluation presence assisted in the presentation of a distorted picture of the project environment, and contributed to further splitting off of relationships, by splitting the actual experiences and responses from the fabricated response. I will show the deleterious effects of these contortions.

Using what Winnicott (1960a) calls the “false self” – a resolution of tension to some degree, but at the cost of authentic relationships and ways of being, I consider the consequences of the tensions on the interrelational structure of the project. The perversity which arises from this deceit is predominantly an undermining of the mutually beneficial contract between people that underlies organizational activity.

5.3 Vignette 1: Embarrassment and control as defences

As the evaluation coordinator, I had been asked to present the Evaluation Plan to an MI Advisory Committee, within two weeks of my formal commencement with the project. I had met
with the senior members of the MI project in recent months to work on some elements of the plan, but it was still in early draft form, and no members of the MI Project team, other than my two colleagues in the Evaluation Working Group, had been involved in discussing the ideas in the plan.

The Project Manager and I had carefully considered the length (approximately 6 pages) and content of the material which would be sent out to the members of the Advisory Committee. We had expected that this document would have been forwarded along with other Committee documentation.

Prior to the presentation, I had sought advice from the leader of the Evaluation Unit within the Department. I asked his opinion on whether I should refer to the Departmental policy on evaluation. He replied:

I had a quick chat to [Portfolio Manager] and he is even more adamant that you stay away from [Departmental] policy [on evaluation] etc. He said you need to be quick and snappy and that your audience is likely to see evaluation as an imposition. The line you need to take is that evaluation is something that is beneficial and part of normal departmental practice.

Again, while not finding the response helpful, I didn’t draw too much more from it until much later.

I got off to a difficult start on the day of my presentation to the MI Advisory Committee. Part way into my presentation, I received some nonverbal communication from one of the Committee members, indicating that he didn’t have the ‘circulated documentation’ I was referring to in my presentation. It transpired the Portfolio Manager had intervened when he had sighted the material I had forwarded to be circulated; he had deemed the document too long, and therefore not to be circulated. Neither I nor the Project Manager had been informed of this decision.

I then found the disk with my presentation on it wouldn’t open. I struggled through the presentation, trying to be attentive to the conversation that followed my interrupted and incomplete presentation. I was distracted by these events, and did not feel I was able to actively facilitate interaction and comment on the Evaluation Plan from the Advisory Committee members.
In an email to the Program Leader the following day I didn’t mention the inappropriate behaviour of the Portfolio Manager, who had overridden the Project Manager in relation to the circulation of the Evaluation Plan. I merely stated in the email to the Program Leader that I had assumed all would go to plan, and commented on the “less than scintillating start” with the disk not opening, and continued in the email with another matter unrelated to the event of that day.

5.3.1 Vignette 1 – Discussion

This vignette is illuminating at a number of levels. I will restrict my comments to the use of control by the Department, in particular the subordination of the evaluation effort by the controlling behaviour of senior staff, and the way in to the operation of the defences of embarrassment works as a control mechanism.

Before discussing these points, I would like to consider one alternative hypothesis about the control of the evaluation presence. It could be seen that the limiting of the information to be presented to the Advisory Committee might have arisen from some concern that as a PhD student I would burden the members with too much detail? While this may have been a concern, I believe the interpretations I offer below have more salience.

1: Demonstration of the subordination of the evaluation effort by the controlling behaviour of senior staff, and the collusion of the leader of the Evaluation Unit in this process

The Portfolio Manager’s advice to the leader of the Evaluation Unit, that I should be “quick and snappy”, and that evaluation was likely to be seen as an imposition, can be seen as an exercise of control. Control, in this case over the Advisory Committee process, was required to minimize the risk of unknown or unplanned responses arising from the meeting. I later saw the leader of Evaluation’s presumption that participants would see evaluation as an imposition, as a direct request not to engage. As I was new to the Departmental processes and culture, and as I had asked for the opinion of the leader of the Evaluation Unit, I took his advice, although in the event, the choice of whether to engage or not was somewhat taken away from me, given what happened at the meeting. At the time I saw this experience as a lost opportunity to integrate evaluation early into the project. But as I gained more experience with the project and the Department, I saw that the dominant force operating was that of Departmental control over the possibility of unanticipated outcomes of dialogue.
2: The functionality of embarrassment as a control mechanism.

In my email correspondence to the Program Leader the day after my presentation to the MI Advisory Committee, I did not make reference to the incident. In doing this, I avoided making reference to an incident which I had found embarrassing, and which I believe the Project Manager and Program Leader found embarrassing, particularly given the usual performative nature of the presentations made by these Departmental members to this Advisory Committee. The avoidance in this instance worked to maintain the status quo. The retreat in embarrassment, my own defence mechanism, put off the task of facing the fact that something very wrong had occurred, which was a serious breach of working relationships, by the Portfolio Manager intervening in a task I was responsible for, without bringing this to my attention, or to that of the Project Manager. I had, in my retreat in embarrassment and my willingness to do this presentation without staff input, allowed myself to be caught up in these machinations.

3: The pervasive operation of control

I became ensnared in the systemic defences displayed by Departmental officers, which characterized the project environment. I see my agreement to even perform in this way at the Advisory Committee, by presenting an evaluation plan that the staff group had not had input into, as an early example of getting caught up in these performative demands. Among these demands were the need to be seen to be organized, to be ‘ahead of the game’ in evaluation planning, but put forward in such a way that while it may seem like an attempt to engage, it was in fact an illusion of engagement. It took me considerable time to form this view.

Control is a response, I argue, in an environment where anxiety about uncertainty is high. I was to learn subsequently that my experience of the way in which my presentation was controlled was not an isolated incident. I observed 5 Advisory Committee meetings, and witnessed several strategies used by the Department to maintain control. Among these control mechanisms were the careful planning of the Department presentations to the Advisory Committee. The senior officers who attended these the Advisory Committee meetings held a planning meeting a fortnight before the meetings, to carefully script their presentations and performance.

Another control mechanism used by the Department, was the presentation of decisions made by the Department in relation to the project, as fait accompli. I observed producers’ open mouthed responses to project decisions about which they felt they should have been at least consulted.
These distancing mechanisms had the effect of curtailing the ability of the MI Advisory Committee to actually engage with the difficulties experienced by the project team and producers in implementing the MI project. From my position I was able to triangulate impressions about these controlling behaviours. When I asked one Advisory Committee member later in the project whether a particular issue would be brainstormed at the Advisory Committee, he commented wistfully that it had been a long time since the Committee had brainstormed anything. The meetings themselves were often ones where what seemed to dominate was a sense of performance rather than that of interactive dialogue. The Chair of the Advisory Committee, in reflecting critically on himself in discussion with me toward the end of the project, said that the Advisory Committee dealt with matters “which were brought forward to it at the discretion of the Department.” He told in these words, that he felt he had allowed himself to be controlled by the Department in this regard. It seems reasonable to conclude that one of the approaches of the North-South performative axis is to keep very close guard on the content and extent of discussable material. I came to see this as a type of systemic defence.

The perverse outcome of these controlling behaviours then was the undermining of the mutually beneficial contract between people that underlies organizational activity – in this instance, the undermining of the possibility that those concerned on the Advisory Committee could contribute fully to the direction of the project and the evaluation process.

5.4 Vignette 2: Evaluation folly: the presumption of dialogue

This next account provides an insight into the tendency of individuals and groups to project their anxiety onto others and into related processes of how individuals and groups defend against dialogue and engagement. I provide two examples of such projections and outline a response I made to these occurrences in the naïve belief that if the parties could be brought together, these projections would diminish. The two examples I provide entailed projections of staff onto the Advisory Committee, and projections of producers onto staff.

I had been with the project only a few months, when my unease at the barriers to communication between the parties began to grow. One of the first things I noticed was that staff, producers and managers were projecting their concerns onto each other, in a blameful way. One staff member had expressly stated that he felt unsupported by the MI Advisory Committee in the work he was doing in the project. Having been to the MI Advisory Committee meetings, I wondered how the members would get to know any of the struggles the staff were having, given the tight control
the Department held over the agenda, and its efforts to minimize difficulties experienced in the project, as discussed in the previous vignette.

The staff were not alone in their projections onto others of their feelings of concern. The group of producers, who were meeting to consider the formation of the Supply Structure company, were beginning to raise questions in their comments to me about the genuineness of the project staff. One Supply Structure group member voiced this most directly to me: “Do staff actually share the goals of the Project with us?”

In April of Year 2, after hearing and experiencing these and other statements reflecting the growing distrust of the parties involved in the project toward one another, I proposed to the Project Manager a one-day meeting of the three parties, being the Project staff, the Supply Structure company, and the MI Advisory Committee. I costed the meeting at $16,000, costing both staff time, and also building in the equivalent of “sitting fees” for the producers, to pay them for their time in reading materials and attending the meeting. The producers were the only people among the three parties whose time, as far as I could establish, was not paid for. I felt I could propose such a meeting from the narrow hold on the one strand of organizational responsibility I had, which was to coordinate the evaluation component of the project. With the task of coordinating the evaluation component came an amount of money, and while the amount was never specified, I had no doubt it was a considerable amount, from which my student stipend would be making minimal demands.

In my covering letter proposing that this budgetary allocation be made for this more developmental function, I noted that

the project needs to …..demonstrate that no one group has the answers, and that in fact everyone is dependent on each other, at least in the foreseeable future. Project development can thus only be a collaborative effort. I don’t think the project has reached this goal of being a collaborative project yet…

Within a few minutes of me sending the email to the Project Manager, with the proposal attached, he rang to tell me that he thought it premature to bring the parties together. In describing why he thought this, he said that parties needed only to be “kept informed”, that producers were not in a position to “tell us what to do”, and that they would get information “when the time was right”. The Project Manager seemed to need to keep the producers at a distance, and appeared to experience my comments on some of their perspectives as threatening.
The metaphor he used to describe his own situation to me at this time was that he felt he was on a tightrope. While at one level aggressively denying that others had legitimate perspectives on the Project and its operation, he was also conveying an image of the vulnerable position he felt himself to be in, in trying to balance the competing perspectives.

I withdrew quite promptly from the position I had taken on the need for a meeting of all parties, felt embarrassed that I have even put up the idea, and informed my two Evaluation Working Group colleagues (whom I had not involved in this piece of correspondence) that I now feel I can “work within the constraints of the project, [being the disparateness of the key players] ….”

I heard from a member of the team that one of the program leaders had referred to the proposed meeting in his presence as the “$16,000 meeting”. I took this to reflect some disparagement.

By way of comparison I have placed in Appendix 4, a costing I carried out of a number of meetings held of staff in this product group, meetings held to come up with a methodology to carry out what the Department called “economic evaluation”. This conservative costing was $22,000. I believe this demonstrates the pressure on Departments to pursue data which supports their performance within economic paradigms. It also supports the presumptions in the Compass model, which is that the administrative North-South axis predominates, and part of the effect of this dominance is that other aspects of project life, in particular, the relational aspects, are obscured and hence undervalued.

5.4.1 Vignette 2 – Discussion

The swift and negative response to my suggestion surprised me at the time, but over time I was able to see in this negativity a pattern in the avoidance of engagement between project leaders and the producers, particularly those producers with a stronger role in the project, such as the Supply Structure producers. In the light of this retrospective analysis of these avoidances, and what can be seen as the anxiety which required the operation of such defences, I now feel my proposal for a ‘consultative meeting’ to have been naive. It pinpointed the very thing that was being guarded against – the opportunity and capacity for dialogue, mutual engagement, and shared responsibility – all unarguably positive aspirations, but at the same time, holding within them considerable sources of anxiety. Later in this chapter, I return to the theory which underpins the argument as to why such ‘positive’ values and practices (dialogue, mutual engagement, shared responsibility) might hold such potential for anxiety, and why the very idea that they might be aspired to or even discussed, needed to be foreclosed on very quickly, within
minutes, in fact, as the Project Manager showed in his response to me. That the Project Manager saw himself on a tightrope suggests he did not see himself in a strong position, or a safe space, from which to receive and manage what he feared to be the strong negative responses from the parties.

5.5 Vignette 3: Blaming staff for their work environment

The context of this vignette is my attendance at the first regional staff meeting in the first quarter of Year 2 and the detail derives from conversations with the Project Manager on the way to and returning home from the meeting, and also my observations during the meeting.

It was with considerable dismay that I heard the Project Manager’s negative attitudes to many of the project staff when travelling with him to my first regional staff meeting. The blaming attitude towards staff was a concern for me in its own right, as at a very basic level it denoted the likelihood of disharmonious and disrespectful working relationships (Frost, 1980). But it had an added dimension of concern to me due to my initial thesis focus on my involvement with project staff where I had hoped to act as an intermediary between their practice and the processes of shaping jointly constructed knowledge with them, for use in evaluation reporting.

My initial conversation with the Project Manager revealed his stated perceptions that, by and large, the project staff were not “up to the job”. On this and at least two other occasions, when I would question why he wouldn’t support an initiative put forward by staff (such as the purchase of educational materials on product processing for their use in their work with producers), the project manager stated to me that “If they were 100% on the project, the project went for longer, and the selection were differently made, I’d be behind it”. He was of the view that there were “too few ‘product’ people in this Department. They’re the sorts of people you need in this project”. But it was particular sort of “product people” – it was people, he said, who knew how to “sell an idea”.

One way he would distance himself from interaction with the staff on difficult matters was to not take up the issues they would bring forward in meetings. On the way home after my attendance at my first regional meeting, when I asked the Project Manager why he didn’t take up a particular idea the staff put forward, he told me he regarded the issue as ‘noise’. When I enquired as to what he meant by noise, he said that he meant “something someone can handle themselves”.

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5.5.1 Vignette 3 – Discussion

The criticisms of staff by Project Manager, in relation to the problems of staff not being “100% on the project”, and “if the project went for longer”, were not of the staff’s making. In discussing the Compass model in Chapter 1, I referred to the notion of “projectification”, as a strategy of the North-South administrative axis, an idea which describes the increase in the project as a work form, with resultant short-term project durations, and other short term effects. Also, in an environment where multiple projects typically also meant multiple funding sources, staff were typically allocated to more than one project. While the project as a work form may be desirable for administrative control, and that this may be the basis for the proliferation of projects as a work form (Hodgson, 2002), they in fact do not bring greater control, but greater fragmentation, for projects, for staff and no doubt for program clients.

This lack of control over the staff group seemed related to the Project Manager’s response of blaming, itself a defensive response which acts to avoid facing and managing of the situation at hand. Blame also seemed misdirected from the point of view that there were some limitations on the staff in terms of their capacity to exercise control over “contingencies that are important to them” (Nord, 1978a, p.855, cited in Frost, 1980, p.501). I have data (which I will provide later in this chapter) that the impediments to the staff’s sense of responsibility for their work brought about by a projectified work environment were of concern to them, yet from the position of the Project Manager, who had been brought in to manage this one project, his concerns were for productivity from this particular project and not with the wider system in which the staff worked. The results for which he was to be held accountable had to arise from this staff group, whether or not they were spread far and wide in their work responsibilities. Similarly, staff could not be blamed for how they were selected. Some staff had had limited past experience with commercial marketing issues, for which they could not be blamed. In the Project Manager’s mind, people who knew how to “sell an idea”, were not the same people who “worked for the government”. The systemic pressures of Market and State came into play in a harmful way within the MI project, in a way which contributed to blame, and further splitting off of the work tasks from the means through which the tasks were achieved, being the relationships of the project members with each other, and with the program clients.
5.6 Vignette 4: Staff relational responsibilities and uncertainty

I have referred to the fact that the project staff found it difficult to source enough product from individual producers, to build consignments to meet the demand from processors. This difficulty led to the formation of the relationship with the product cooperative. Another strategy used by the project was to explore whether a futures market approach to selling the product might overcome some of the difficulties in finding enough product. The underlying logic here was that if the producer could “sell” his product to MI using a futures contract, MI had access to the product to put it through the MI project channels, and the producer could be offered a price for his product (on entering the futures contract) in a more timely manner. Had this been a workable practice, this would have alleviated one of the problems experienced in the first round of consignment building, which was that the producer had a considerable wait while the consignment was being built. Prices could not be offered to all participants in a consignment until it was fully built. In the words of one producer, this left producers “exposed for too long”, with a possible result of monetary loss if the market improved during this period of waiting.

The idea of using the futures market did not reach fruition. Both project managers and producers deemed prices quoted by the futures business to supply this service too high. However, before the idea was abandoned, the staff had to address how they might work in with this idea. In a staff meeting discussion exploring how using futures contracts might work, one staff member said: “Does this mean we give our lists (of producers) to Bill?” (the person selling the ‘futures’ contracts). Just after he asked this question, this staff member followed on with another question. “And what do we do if the product isn’t acceptable for a consignment?” This was an important question for a staff member who had used his relationship with a producer to engage the producer in the MI project. It was through this relationship between staff member and producer in many instances that the producer had agreed to participate in the project. If the product was initially seen as right for the consignment, and the producer was willing to participate, and later this product was no longer required, this was a matter of concern to the staff member whose actions had secured the producer’s interest in the first place. The staff member has foreseen this, in his question – “What do we do if the product [at the end of the day] is no longer suitable for a consignment?”

The Program Leader responded: “We can’t be responsible for everything”. Another staff member, in response to the Program Leader’s comment, said “That’s a broker’s response – not our response”. The Program Leader reiterated: “We can’t be responsible for all their issues”, to
which the staff member who posed the original question responded: “It doesn’t sound like we’ve got the job under control”.

5.6.1 Vignette 4 – Discussion

I observed the staff member posing these questions to be unsettled with the lack of resolution of the issue of what to do with the product of the participating producer. It seemed to me that the staff members were wanting to realize what I would call a more “responsible” relationship with the producers. The staff members raising the concerns seemed to be responding in a different way to the social relations in which they were engaged with producers than were the project leaders. This makes sense, in that it was the relationship between the staff member and the producer which was the medium through which they did their work.

This observation is in keeping with Schwandt’s (2003b) ideas of the importance of understanding the issues practitioners struggle with, as they wrestle with defining and acting on their responsibilities and strive to make sense of their obligations to one another as staff members, and to program clients. There seems to be no room for a degree of relatedness to be contemplated. There was no language for, or medium in which to describe these responses. Added to this, the response made by the Project Leader seemed dismissive, (“We can’t be responsible for all their issues”), conveying also perhaps a sense that it was burdensome to be as responsible as the staff members engaging in this conversation seemed to be suggesting.

These sorts of responsibilities were certainly not part of the prevailing discourse about what the priorities were in this new work environment. Fletcher (1998) describes how relationally oriented work practices are screened out in certain work environments. In this project too, responses denoting staff members’ relational responsibilities to program clients such as the one I recount below “got disappeared” (Fletcher, 1998).

Perhaps the wider environment into which the Project leaders were directing their attention, brought with it different ethical perspectives. Here time pressure, deliverables, and other outcome pressures may work to reduce the focus of project management on the relational aspects of project life, due to the performative pressure in the organizational environment in which they are more structurally located. There is a large canvas of concerns here – expectations of staff, loss of control by staff of primary relationships with producers, concerns about integrity in relationships, personal responsibility for one’s work, approaches to honest business relationships and ongoing business relationships.
I raise these issues of relational responsibilities here to bring them to the surface, and to hold them over for further discussion on this idea of relational responsibility when I discuss accountability in chapter 7.

5.7 Vignette 5: Evaluation’s challenge to performativity

This vignette provides an account of a reaction I received to the presentation of some findings in the Interim Evaluation Report.

From my earliest contact with the Project Manager, which was only three months after he had begun in the Project Manager position, he appeared to have already formed a definite set of views about the character traits of producers. However, it was in August of Year 2, when I presented a draft of what we called the Interim Evaluation Report that his blameful responses to producers were delivered to me with their greatest force and clarity. I had prepared the Interim Evaluation Report together with my two Evaluation Working Group colleagues, and had forwarded the report by email prior to my meeting with the Project Manager at his office.

I set out below five brief examples of feedback from staff and producers which the Evaluation Working Group presented in a section of the Interim Evaluation Report which highlighted the complexities for producers and staff. These examples cite comments from producers and staff about what was called an “intention to ‘commit’” (i.e. the producer’s stated intention in relation to whether he would make any of his product available for sale through the MI project.). These responses constitute the producer’s response to a central issue in their working life, their livelihood, being the pricing of their product. For many producers in the MI project, the sale of their product typically constituted the sole, or a major source, of their annual income.

- **Name of Producer**: “We do have [x amount of product] in store with test results, but we may want to sell all before Easter for cash flow purposes”

- **Staff member**: “[Name of Producer] has just been on the phone advising he has had some unexpected product results just received. He has given me the details which are [X & Y] … The product is up for sale, with a target price, but if it doesn’t sell, then he will put it into MI…He will ring and let us know what happened”

- **Staff member**: “[Name of Producer] is holding until we notify him if the product can be used or not”
• **Staff member:** “[Producer] has put his product up for sale on 16th June…Will withdraw if he is offered a price he is happy with before this date…very difficult I know”

• **Staff member:** “I informed her that her product is likely to be suitable for the consignment. She and her husband are very interested in the project. She did however, express that it is very much price dependent..They are keen to find out more about the logistics and contracts etc”

The Project Manager had read the draft Interim Report prior to my meeting with him. He commenced the meeting by referring to the notes he subsequently passed to me which were deeply etched down margins of the report adjacent to the sections where the above quotes were cited. A representative sample of these handwritten notes conveys the tone of blamefulness. “This is all about price, price, price. Short term, hip pocket decisions and is one reason why the industry is where it is at. There was no mention of communication flow, trust, relationship, sharing ideas.”

5.7.1 Vignette 5 – Discussion

The Project Manager experienced the producers’ responses as an attack. Sometimes his frustration became tinged with antagonism and anger, in his comments to me, such as: “The psychology of price: it is the major thing the industry has to get over”. In this comment he shows in a startling way the distance between himself and the producers, as to the matter of price. I had several interchanges with the Project Manager on these questions. He would frequently say that producers were “unreasonable” and “short sighted”. He would often say that producers “failed” because they were intent on “going after premiums” (higher prices). En route to my first MI Advisory Committee meeting in a Regional Centre in the first quarter of Year 2 (the meeting referred to in Vignette 1 above) the Project Manager suggested to me that I should make a point of speaking to a particular member of the Advisory Committee who, he said, would be able to explain to me just how “fickle” these producers are. On his return from an interstate trip to talk to another industry body about how that body had managed to encourage producers to get more involved in supply chains, the Project Manager seemed keen to tell me that ‘they’, the other industry body, had “the exact same issues”. He explained to me that by the “exact same issues”, he meant the tardiness of producers to embrace change. It was as if the Project Manager felt under siege, and that these fickle producers stood between him and the expected number of consignments he was expected to deliver, consignments made up through producers across the regions offering to participate with their product and this product delivered to overseas processors.
The Project Manager’s response which I have typified as being as if he was under siege, can be understood as someone whose work pressure and anxiety had precluded his usual understanding of the everyday experience of producers, and some of the expected difficulties they may face in participating in a project with a degree of uncertainty about it, and in the context of an industry in which the producers were known to be facing difficulties in terms of deriving an adequate income from this product. While I am singling out the Project Manager for comment here, I grew to understand that what he enacted was reflective of the wider culture in which the MI project was being delivered. The MI project, and the Project Manager, could not contain the strong feelings, difficulties, contestations, ambiguities and uncertainties experienced at the project level. I will show that neither were these able to be contained at the Departmental level.

5.8 Vignette 6: Evaluation in the shadows of discontent  - cutting adrift the Supply Structure company

There are several key pieces of information required for background to this vignette, which I set out in the following paragraph. This information includes a recognition that it was reasonable for the Supply Structure company members to believe that they would get access to those producers interested in continuing business relationships with processors, through gaining access to the project data base.

The thought behind the formation of the Supply Structure company was that a legal entity which could trade was necessary to continue the business relationships set up under the project. The Department convened the group of eight producers, some of whom did not know each other. In convening this group, there was a seemingly genuine belief among senior Departmental officers, that this group of producers would and should “attain ownership” of the processes of formation of their company. The Department received some threats from outside the project, that their work in relation to the formation of the company could be seem to be an inappropriate role for government. The Department, in the words of one MI project staff member, “cut adrift” from this work in an effort to distance themselves from external threat. The company lodged its registration papers with the appropriate authority in the period just after the formal cessation of the MI project. Finally, the Supply Structure company work was reported in an unproblematized manner in a small paragraph in the Final Project report (SC 6, p.9).

However to leave the account as stated in the Final Project report is to paper over some cracks in the project façade, cracks which demonstrated important occurrences in relation to the company
development which gave insight into the competing tensions in the North-South administrative axis, keen to keep control of its environment, and the East-West axis, where the actual relational work of Department to producer, and producer to producer needed to occur.

The eight producers, chosen to form the group to explore the Supply Structure idea, appeared to believe they were seeking to form a business which would in time liaise with the other producers interested in this form of direct selling of their product and the maintenance of the business relationships commenced under the MI project. One of the key members of the Supply Structure group put the idea of the proposed new company’s relationship with the MI Project team in this way: he said that he envisaged what the MI project team members were doing was “building a network to access everyone who has expressed an interest”, a network of producers which would then continue to supply product to the overseas processors, a network which would become part of the resource to be drawn on by the Supply Structure company.

The network which the MI project team members were developing was symbolized in the MI project data base, which contained the contact details and production information provided by producers, denoting their interest and possible future involvement in this model of selling their product. The producers who were forming the Supply Structure company assumed that this data base of the details of this producer network would be transferred to them after the completion of the MI project work, following appropriate formalities of seeking permission from producers on this data base. I observed that project staff and project leaders also presumed that the details of those producers who agreed to this, would have their details passed on to the Supply Structure company. At the day-to-day level then, there was agreement that the Department was acting as a ‘proxy’ in developing the relationships with producers, proxy in the sense of being a time limited substitute for the Supply Structure company, who would then maintain and further these relationships. The producers who were meeting to consider the formation of the Supply Structure company were correct in their claim that many of the producers who expressed an interest in and participated in the MI Project did so on the basis that in the longer term, the work carried out by the Project would be a development which ultimately would be managed, by some structural arrangement, by producers. I heard many producers express this sentiment. The setting up of the Supply Structure company then was seen as the first step in implementing the producer based network structure.

While at some level there was commonality in the perspectives of the key parties in the project that what was being developed would be owned by the producers, in an eerily prescient sense, the language used about this development was couched in terms of the vulnerability of this task.
The imagery used by the producers and the Chair of the MI Advisory Committee who was particularly committed to the development of the Supply Structure company, was typically organic. Words and phrases used included a baby, a ‘sapling’, a ‘tender shoot’, a ‘delicate flower’. Something was definitely being ‘raised’ and ‘tendered’. Along with this vulnerability, were other (associated) images voiced by producers. One image voiced by one of the producers explicitly foreshadowed what was to come about: a fear of being ‘left out in the cold’.

When I observed my first Supply Structure company meeting I heard references to the fear that ideas, and the people who carry out these ideas, can be abandoned. At this meeting, some of the producers present voiced disquiet that in their involvement in the Supply Structure process, that they may repeat an experience they had already had with the Department, which was to put in a lot of their time, to find that the Department’s commitment to what they had begun together would wane or change. This group of producers often cited a celebrated case of such an experience of the Department withdrawing from a commitment to deliver work the content of which had been developed together with producers.

In my presence, there was never any talk about the organic development which the company would have to engage in if it was to relate in a sustainable way with a broader base of producers. This would have been a much slower long term process. At the time I attempted to put in front of the Portfolio Manager some documentation about mutuality as an orienting concept for the interests of this group of producers (Mathews, 1991; 2001). However, these ideas were not only not supported, they were actively discouraged by subsequent Departmental action.

Cutting adrift the Supply Structure company

I have noted that the threat posed by the Department’s work in relation to the Supply Structure company was never very clear, what was clear was that the Department saw that this had to respond quickly and brutally to the threat. This behaviour was expressed as the Department distancing itself from the members of the Supply Structure company. This left the group, in the words of one producer, “abandoned”, at a time when they were in need of dialogue, information and assistance, to come to some agreement as to how they might take up and continue their role, after the conclusion of the MI project. One example of this need was the management of the database, held by the Department, containing the details of producers interested in the goals of the project and with that, the work of the Supply Structure company. One Supply Structure company member referred to this database as an example of the sort of information needed by the Supply Structure company, information which he saw as “log-jammed in the Department’s
computers”. The data base provided the means through which the company members could maintain their relationships with producers. This developmental mutual work, particularly the producer to producer relationship, still needed some structural link to and support from the Departmental North-South administrative arm, at least for a little while longer, until at the very least the database handover details were worked through.

However, this was not to be. As the degree of threat to the Department about their work with this company heightened, the Department began to give off different signals to the Supply Structure company group in relation to their overall relationship, and also at the level of the detail of such critical issues as the MI project database. Typical comments by senior staff included: “Was the passing of the database [to the Supply Structure company] really what was agreed to?” and “This may not be so straightforward.” In short, this was behaviour which was consistent with the Department stalling and distancing from the Supply Structure company.

I learnt that it was several months after the end of the MI project before the first step was taken in the process of transferring the data base information, this step being the drawing up of paperwork to seek producers approval to pass on their contact details. I don’t know how much longer it took to achieve the transfer of information, or whether it ever took place. This was a concrete manifestation of a wider process of distancing, a process which was experienced by several members of the Supply Structure company as a betrayal, a serious breach of trust – ie, a serious breach at the relational level. The Chair of the MI Advisory Committee also had misgivings about the role of the Department in distancing itself from the producers, and was also critical of himself in this regard. In relation to the Supply Structure company work, the Chair told me “We haven’t applied our own minds as we should have…”

For the purposes of this vignette, it is sufficient to note that the Department pulled away from its commitments to the Supply Structure company group members, and that this undermined the already tenuous trust in the relationships held by these producers with the Department. It also undermined the development of the Supply Structure company itself. Twelve months after the end of the MI project, I was told that the Supply Structure company had not traded any product with the purchasers of their product, being overseas processors. To me, the sustainability of the company, from the position of twelve months out from the end of the MI project, seemed unlikely. This was a disheartening outcome to an idea that had held hope, and goodwill, despite a considerable degree of risk.
5.8.1 Vignette 6 – Discussion

In reporting aspects of the Supply Structure company, I am seeking to illustrate some of the difficulty for the Department operating the North-South administrative axis. I want to flag the likely impact on producers when their interests which relate more to mutually oriented, localized product supply enterprises, become submerged. I wish also to set the background for the impact on evaluation processes, which I set out in vignette 7 below, when the ongoing tensions for government and program clients at the intersection of the North-South axis, with the East-West axis, need to be resolved in the Department’s favour.

Why was this work so difficult? There seemed to be a poverty of thinking as to how the work of the Supply Structure company might be best carried out. I argue that this was in part due to the anxiety roused by the difference and difficulty in this work compared to some other Departmental work. This anxiety was fuelled in the performative climate in which it was seeking to grow. A key dimension of these difficulties was in part that outcomes, or at least outcomes which were of a sustainable nature, could not be predicted, and that they rested more on the development of relationships, the formation of which, and the outcomes of which, both required a trust and a need for the Department to let go some control. I believe the distancing between the Department and the producers was harmful to Departmental relations with these producers, harmful to the prospects of these producers making timely links with other producers for their shared business interests, harmful to the prospect of future relationships of good will between the producers and the Department, and contributed to an overall deterioration in the likelihood of future positive social, including work, relationships being created, sustained and transformed.

The needs of the Department dominated and the needs of the Supply Structure company, to maintain involvement with the project while they furthered the work on how they might take up their role, were submerged. Both sets of needs, those of the Department’s and of the Supply Structure company, could not be held and valued at the same time. The dominance exuded by the North-South administrative axis prevailed. This vignette then provides an example of the tension and splits which can follow from what might be seen primarily to be an East-West activity, a group of producers working together to form a company, for the wider interests of other producers in their regions, but which could not be solely an East-West activity, as it was in fact quite tightly controlled by the dominant North-South axis.

This vignette also foreshadows possible future tensions in public sector work, where public servants are required to take on new roles, where there is an increased emphasis on partnerships, particularly private/public partnerships, on collaboration, on efforts toward ‘network
governance’, and on the management of contested ideologies between the various parties. The emerging literature on managing partnerships is beginning to point to these dilemmas (eg. Considine and Lewis, 1999; Newall and Swan, 2000). If these difficulties are considered also in the light of evaluation being a mandatory organizational function, both these factors, the difficulties in managing partnerships, and evaluation as a mandatory evaluation organizational function, will increasingly expose evaluation practice to the risk of the disappointing outcomes which were experienced in this case – a co-option of evaluation into the dominant North-South axis, and the corrosive moral consequences that attend such co-option. It will also leave, as it did in this case study, alternative views and the holders of those views submerged.

5.9 Vignette 7: Evaluation as performative instrument

The last example I will provide from the MI case in this chapter is to offer an account of the means used by the Department to recast the work of the Supply Structure company, means which entailed the involvement of the evaluation presence in the recasting. I conclude that the outcomes of the way the Supply Structure company structure was managed and reported, were harmful, even perverse. The distance the Department created between themselves and the members of the Supply Structure company toward the end of the project, were to my mind the most regrettable actions which took place within the project.

What remained for the Department was the task of ensuring that the work to do with the Supply Structure company was represented in a way which would minimize any likelihood that the work could be misinterpreted. As the coordinator of evaluation, I acquiesced, under instruction, to this anxiety, and in the drafts of the Final Project report, adopted the required language which was given to me by senior Departmental officers, to minimize the possibility that such any inference of inappropriate work could be made. For me there was considerable irony in the fact that, in my opinion, the Department had failed to support the Supply Structure group in an appropriate way, by offering only a limited facilitation, and creating a climate of forced outcomes in timelines which only made sense in Departmental ‘outcome’, ‘deliverable’ terms.

The anxiety about the possible threat to the Department, due to their work with the Supply Structure company, led senior managers to re-evaluate its work in relation to the Supply Structure company, particularly its written documentation, for details of its actions. I was placed under very clear instructions not to put “red lights” around the rendition of the Supply Structure work in the Final Project Report. The Portfolio Manager advised the Evaluation Working Group that the project was at risk of being seen to be “too close to the market” and that this concern was
something that had been “imposed” on him. This forced distance was also clearly hazardous for Departmental leaders, those whose ‘bums would be on the line’, a phrase used by the Program Leader, should this unknown fear materialize into an actionable threat, action which in the mind of the Portfolio Manager would take the form of an allegation that the Department had used their powers inappropriately with this project intervention.

The distancing necessitated by this period of anxiety as to how the Supply Structure would be represented, was difficult also for some staff who had personal relationships with some of the members of the Supply Structure group. I was not privy to what the producers were told about the reasons for the Department creating distance from the company, but I was personally doubtful that they would have given the actual detail of what had triggered this need to reshape the public face of the work. I had no way of forming an opinion on the likelihood of such an action against the Department. What was clear was the considerable anxiety which the threat posed, and the efforts to minimize the Departmental role in terms of what was put into writing.

Members of the Evaluation Working Group received what I would call two sorts of instruction as to how the Department’s work with the Supply Structure company group needed to be represented. The first style of advice I would call “conversational”, the second “didactic/instructional”.

The conversational advice took the form of a senior member of the Departmental Executive telling the Evaluation Working Group that he was keen to “downplay” the commercial side of the project, and that “we had to be careful not to focus on the commercial future” of the work. “The Project has done a great deal – created a great deal of information of a generic use”. We had to be careful that “that didn’t get lost”. This person continued: “The commercial part of it was always back of mind”, and something “industry had to put its mind to”. I have added an emphasis here to “industry”, to point up the change of “agency” - agency in terms of the person carrying out the action – a change from the Department as convenor of the group of Supply Structure producers, to one that “industry had to put its mind to”. “Anyone could have put up their hand” (to form the company). In a more straightforward moment, this person told me the project had been a “political nightmare”.

Another senior member of the Department was somewhat more didactic. He said of the Supply Structure company work:
We can’t be seen to be developing a business…[It] clearly needs to be seen to be separate (from the Department)… That’s how serious it is…. …We haven’t set them up – we have provided facilitatory support…[The] question needed to be reframed along the lines of …’A group of people elected to take advantage of….the opportunities….

The Project Manager’s preferred form of words to me to keep in mind were that the Supply Structure Company group had been

provided with facilitation…It was totally their decision (to set up the company) …(We) can’t tell anyone what to do. They achieved a milestone…It doesn’t mean we are pushing them to form the company. It was something they had an interest in. And bingo, they did it…

As with all such contradictions, constructions and reconstructions, the story still had to be managed, and it fell to the Project Manager to see that the ‘party line’ was followed. There were follow up behaviours which had to be kept in check, to maintain this picture of a freely operating self activating group of producers, working independently from the Department, being assisted with few if any resources, and working toward the formation of the company. The image that would come to mind for me, after I was given such forms of words as these on how best to represent the company, was of a horse with its own reins in its mouth.

5.9.1 Vignette 7 – Discussion

The “Market State” ethos of governance was new ground, anxiety provoking, and hard to negotiate. These difficulties could only be experienced, rather than conceptualized in a way which might allow them to be managed differently. It became necessary for the reporting of this work to focus on the representation of “knowledge that informs the interests of systematic manipulation and control” (VanderPlaat, 1995, cited in Hills, 1998, p.1466). The interests which were being looked after in this scenario were those of the Department, and through my role as coordinator of evaluation, succumbed to the task of selectively documenting this story in the Department’s favour. This provides an example of the shame Dahler-Larsen (2002) has drawn attention to which evaluators can experience when caught up with ‘organicentric’ values.

At the completion of my time with the Department, we had finished the draft report to the satisfaction of the project leaders. One year later, I was posted a copy of the Final Report. On checking the content of the report against that which we had completed twelve months earlier, I
could detect two changes. One was a deletion of a dot point which was a quote from an industry newsletter about how brokers can manipulate product prices. The other change was also a deletion. The Portfolio Manager had had his photograph and introductory comments removed from the report. I interpreted that as an effort to distance himself further from the project.

Where the Department “cut adrift” the members of the Supply Structure Company, for my own part, I also experienced being “cut adrift”. I had become separated from the desires with which I begun the research, which were present when I took up the evaluation coordinator role - to make a contribution to the staff group in their evaluation task, and in so doing develop knowledge about the individual and system requirements where practitioners engage in evaluative inquiry. I was not able to bring about a formative evaluation in a project about which it was initially claimed that its existence depended on producer feedback. Not only did I not achieve these broad aims, but I became alienated from both the Department, while performing written functions at their direction, and also from myself. I discuss these regrettable and painful outcomes later in this chapter.

5.10 Evaluation exposure to defensive responses

Common to all the vignettes is the realisation that there was no space in which these incremental and ultimately harmful developments could be debated, and where the hope of new meanings might be forged. Another common thread is the location of authority within the North-South axis, and the vulnerable role for evaluation subject to this authority, where it either cannot, or it fails to, divorce its own presence from the North-South administrative axis.

I return to these issues for their critical relevance to the practice of evaluation, in the final chapter of the thesis.

Over time, and largely after the end of the period of fieldwork, I found that systems psychodynamics literature was valuable to understand the patterns of defensive behaviour at the different levels of the project experience. Paradoxically this situation reflected many of the wider systemic contradictions which were subjecting all parties to dynamics which were hard to understand and manage, and stressful to experience. The defensive responses engendered in the Project Manager operated as barriers to being able to experience the anxiety inherent in the reality that he was, and the whole project was, dependent on both the producers and the staff, to achieve milestones and to meet deliverables. As the Object Relations theorists argue, dependency is a very vulnerable state of being, arousing very primal anxiety, a state which, in
the absence of a milieu in which to hold it long enough to understand both its force and the meaning it holds for the work, must be denied, and pushed aside, that is, defended against. As noted earlier by Chattopadhay and Malhotra (1991), part of the defensive response to anxiety is the triggering of the desire to control.

The wider issues of the dynamics arising in the context of the bureaucracy, and the ‘new managerialism’, when coupled with the performative, projectified organizational environment, left little room for an appreciation of or even a willingness to be open to, the pressures experienced by staff, including those experienced by the Project Manager. In some ways, the denial of other realities experienced by producers and staff was mirrored in the messages emanating from the wider organization, perhaps best encapsulated in the words of the Portfolio Manager, (the ‘purchaser’ in this Departmental ‘purchaser/provider split,’) when he stated to me: “I [only] invest in outcomes.” Part of the subtext of that statement could be heard as “don’t bother me with the detail of the process”.

These organizational systems (purchaser/provider splits) have been argued to be defences against the anxiety of getting too close to “process”, to implementation, to the lived reality that, when we engage in Boxer’s (2004) challenge to “face facts”, is too difficult to quantify in terms of outcome measures. These contradictory pushes and pulls, when defended against and therefore not recognised, are corrosive of human relationships. I take this idea of corrosive repercussions further in the next section of the thesis.

5.11 Avoidance of interdependence and the creation of a false self

Almost all aspects of the Project became divided from each other:

- the Project Manager and the Project Team
- the Program Leader and the Project Manager – a split which widened as time went on
- the three main groups of actors: The MI Advisory Committee, the Project Team, and the Supply Structure company
- the Department and the Supply Structure company
- the Evaluation Working Group evaluation tasks, and the necessity to produce a fabricated Final Project report

It is paradoxical that the need for interdependence, a state which triggers defences, is at the same time a key mechanism which holds the potential to improve the situation faced by project participants. This is so in relation to the actuality that all the parties in the MI project were in fact
interdependent with each other. This idea was (inadvertently) well put by the Program Leader when he said to a MI project team meeting, that the biggest risk the project faced, was “producers changing their minds”. This comment points to the dependence of the MI project on the “producers’ mind”, (that is, would the producers decide to participate, and maintain that commitment through to point of sale of the consignment), and could be thought about as an interdependence of parties to each other.

The Department, its staff, the producers and the evaluation presence, were all interdependent. This idea of interdependence is well captured in Marris’s (1996) observation that the greatest uncertainty arises from the unpredictability of other people’s behaviour. Defence mechanisms such as have been described in this chapter distanced the parties from each other, in a context where in order to achieve certain outcomes, they were required to depend on each other. This interdependency which they were defending against was the central requirement in achieving these project outcomes. One of these defences is a denial of dependence on an object, and can manifest by attempting to control the object by treating it with contempt, so that its loss is not so painful or frightening.

Defences of splitting, projection, and blaming are indicators of a primitive organizational state of mind, a state of mind which makes it difficult to integrate the input of a variety of its members, to accept some of the ambivalence and complexity which was inevitably part of the project context. I have concentrated on depictions of the splitting processes which both attacked and submerged the systemic and relational dimensions of the project life, which added to the difficulty of creating a project context in which the “whole” could be held, and thought about. The anxiety provoking threats present at the project level were mirrored at the Departmental level, which sought then to impose further strictures on the project evidenced by their management of the Supply Structure company work, by ensuring that it accounted for itself in a particular way, a way which would not bring harm to the Departmental requirement to convey success, and thereby satisfy the performative demands of the environment into which the dominant North-South administrative axis interests were directed. In the absence of a structure within a project to contain and explore the defensive behaviour, a point I return to in chapter 8, it is highly unlikely that enough of a shared meaning will emerge to allow a creative engagement with the project tasks, especially where these tasks are being carried out in a public sector environment increasingly characterized by ethical and moral conflicts (Hoggett, 2005). In the absence of the capacity to allow the presence of multiple meanings, let alone their resolution, evaluation can not only offer little, but if caught in performative requirements of Departments, is likely to do harm.
The research which forms the basis of this case study is particularly important in the light of the fact that many of the tasks which face us in today’s social climate, are relational in essence. As the ‘mutuality’ literature conveys, one way toward recovery in disadvantages regions is to embrace the difficult challenge of sharing risk, pooling resources, developing cooperative structures, perhaps losing some independence to do so, while operating from a basis of interdependence (Leeuwis, 2000; Fairbairn et al, 1991). If these work relationships can be maintained and developed in the wider context of an overall commitment by the organization to an agreed sense of purpose, even a purpose which will require modification and change as information flows from the systems in which it is embedded, “then in so doing it can serve to bind the group together, and contain differences without crushing them” (Hoggett, 2003, p.13).

Various research studies have shown that even where Government departments may not talk about a more communal response to growth and development, that communities can, and do talk about these matters (Nancarrow and Syme, 2001). But as Nancarrow and Syme point out, this development cannot be rushed – a “slower and more inclusive approach may result in a more coherent statement from the community, which includes more than the ‘politically correct’ rationalist view of the world” (p.446).

If my thesis about the difficulty for staff in certain organizational climates to recognise and respond to interdependence is correct, then we are likely to see increasing difficulty for staff as work environments become increasingly more outcome focused and less “relationally” concerned. Such work environments are particularly difficult for staff on the front line, the staff who typically manage the relationship with the program client. Such processes also directly threaten the delivery of projects of maximum quality to program clients.

The emergence of a “false self” and the impact of not having a holding environment

I would like to finish this chapter with an elaboration of some theoretical material which provides an understanding of what can occur if individuals in work groups cannot be bound together in the flexible and creative way Hoggett (2003) points to, and where they compromise themselves in a manner that would usually be unacceptable to them, as I did in my role as coordinator of evaluation within the MI project. In these circumstances, a form of self organization can ensue which is or can become, destructive. Winnicott’s (1960a) ideas here on the “true self” and the “false self” are helpful. In this account I argue that I adopted a “false self” for the duration of the later part of the MI project, an outcome which whilst temporary in my
case, was nonetheless harmful in that it amounted to a disengaged alienated state in which one’s responsibilities are diminished. It is therefore potentially harmful to others, as well as individually corrosive. I rely on Winnicott’s own work, as well as accounts by Applegate and Bonovitz (1995), Cummins (2002), DuBouloy (2002), and Ogden (1998) for understanding of this idea of the false self.

Winnicott (1960a) saw the ‘True Self’ as being attained if the mother can provide a ‘good enough’ responsive holding environment to the developing child. The ‘False Self’ is more likely to be a response to a mother who substitutes an unresponsive gesture in place of a positive responsive gesture toward the child. Ogden (1998) gives an example of a mother’s response of anxiety over separateness being triggered by a child who is engaged in curious exploration. The child detects this anxiety and in such a ‘mismatch’, experiences a disruption to his developing sense of self. Winnicott refers to these disruptions as ‘impingements’, and if these impingements become a central experience for the child, he will react by developing a ‘false self’, in which he monitors his environment and adapts himself to the conscious and unconscious needs of the mother. These children can present as socialised, but it is a ‘front’, an attempt to protect the interior. Applegate and Bonovitz (1995) state that Winnicott believed that the false self has three functions: “it attends to the caregiver, it hides and protects the true self by complying with environmental demands, and it acts as a caretaker” (p.73). Winnicott believed that while a degree of complicity is necessary in adaptive living, there is a question as to how much.

In this case study, I became too complicit. I made one attempt to leave the Project, in a state of some confusion and distress. It was at the end of Year 2, when it seemed that the splits which had occurred within the project were too large to heal, where it was gradually becoming clearer that the evaluation task was likely to become one of writing a one sided account of the Project. I didn’t know what the decision to leave the project would mean for my thesis work, and I was unsure at that stage how I could make a meaningful analysis out of the research up to that point. I told the Project Leader my intentions, and to my surprise, he asked me strongly to reconsider my position, as he was relying on me in relation to the writing of the Final Report. I agreed to stay, to cease my student role and stipend income, and to work for the Department in order to finalise the Final Project Report. I thus became part of, and helped ‘make up’ (du Gay, 1997) the system that I then went on to critique in my research after the end of the Project. I was not able to formulate this critique until well after the cessation of my contact with the Department.

While at one level I exercised a choice to stay with the Project, in another sense I was also using my compliance as a defence, the sort of psychic defence Cummins (2002) explains such a
defence as operating “where emotional truthfulness to self and others is surrendered for compliance” (p.106).

In DuBouloy’s (2002) study she found “high potential executives” used the false self as a defence mechanism in company environments where the individual cannot get what he needs, but is prone to submit to the needs of the organization and conform to the expected norms of behaviour. In Long’s (2001) terms, these outcomes, for individuals, and groups, are perverse, and are a direct result of the sorts of organizational environments which this chapter has sought to describe.

The implications of the adoption of the false self, from within the evaluation role, are obvious. It shows the diminution of the role that evaluation can play, it contravenes the ethics by which an evaluator might aspire to live, it offers additional weight to a false picture of a program reality and sets in train the processes which end in the feelings of shame which Dahler-Larsen (2002) says can accompany the circumstances when evaluation serves an organicentric function.

5.12 Summary

Chapter 5 portrays the interrelationship between the operation of defences in uncertain project environments, and the interaction of these with organizational climates which are contested and constrained, further subjecting staff and project clients to clashes of organizational requirements for performativity, and relational pulls triggered by our sense of responsibility to one another. Blaming is a characteristic of this sort of environment at the project level, and distancing from the details of the project reality at the wider organizational level. Ultimately, as the Compass model predicts, the North-South axis overpowers the operations of the East-West axis, and subordinates this axis to its requirements. In this environment, bringing the key parties together for dialogue was not possible, further sharpening the splits which were occurring at several levels within the project. The subordination of the East-West axis is most colourfully portrayed through the account of the ‘cutting adrift’ of the Supply Structure company work, when the Department, to preserve its North-South dominance, needed to be seen to be at arms length from these activities. Damage resulted from these behaviours. Much of this distancing can be seen as an attempt to avoid the reality that parties were in fact interdependent – a vulnerable state which needs to be defended against, if not contained and worked with.

I have emphasized that this chapter needs to be understood also in the context of chapters 6 and 7, which follow, chapters where the wider system defences become more apparent.
I now turn to chapter 6, in which I set out the Department’s evaluation framework, and which introduces ideas about how the evaluation presence, and its technologies, in the organizational environment begun to be described here, can be shaped in such a way that it makes a negative contribution to the dominant North-South axis, and minimizes the chance of making a meaningful contribution to an understanding of and portrayal of the issues in the East-West axis – the client in his particularity.
Chapter 6 Performative shaping by evaluation technologies

6.1 Introduction

As I have stated earlier, I came to this research with the desire to focus my efforts at the level of the ‘practitioner’, the staff member of the project, delivering the project to producers. My presumption, in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) words, was that the delivery of the project entailed practice where “learning, thinking and knowing are relations among people in activity, in, with and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (p.50). However my initial research focus on evaluation practice at this level of detail and contextual embeddedness of the staff member as practitioner, and the producers in their particularity, moved to needing to understand the vicissitudes of evaluation within the Department itself, a Department in which evaluation was seen as a major contributor to meeting its information needs. At this level, the requirement was for information at a more general, abstract and highly selective form. That is, as the research unfolded, the practice under review became more one of the practice of evaluation in such environments.

In this chapter I show how program evaluation in this case came to be used and misused to construct a calculated façade. In setting the scene for this discussion, I will first briefly revisit the Compass model of contradictory organizational tensions, as set out in Figure 1 in Chapter 1. This model foreshadowed evaluation as one of the ‘tools’ for the maintenance of the domination of the North-South axis – that axis which represented the government and the Department, in circumstances where that representation was required to be “without blemish” (House, 1974). Using Dean’s (1996) terms, evaluation became a “technology of government”, in its capacity to provide particular ways to record, store and reproduce information, its requirement for aggregation of activities across time and space, while also providing a symbol of assurance of accountability.

The description and analysis in this chapter focuses on the often small, incremental steps which, following Weick’s (1995; 2002) analysis of sense-making of new endeavours we are in, are processes which are often only be pieced together after the event. It took me at least three years to understand these processes. And even in retrospect, as I examine some of the steps which were taken to advance the idea of evaluation, each step on its own does not necessarily constitute an adequate exemplar for the ‘thing’ which it became, and is also difficult to trace. It is also the case that the evaluation presence both shapes and is shaped by, the organizational milieux in
which it operates. Certain processes subsumed, or crowded out, the moral and political conduct that might, in other circumstances, have allowed a more sustained focus on the producers and their local issues.

In this chapter I seek to

- demonstrate the ways in which the evaluation presence was shaped within the Department
- show an understanding of the pressures which contribute to this shaping
- name the nature of the harms that arose from this particular shaping

I first discuss the infusion of the evaluation presence with the requirements of the Market state, in particular, the dominant requirement to demonstrate a return on investment, in a Department where it was imperative to show this return in terms of the increase in productivity of the industry groups it assists. Evaluation was not immune from these pressures. Investment had been made in evaluation also and it too had to demonstrate a return on this investment. The pressure to so perform is contained in the “business case” the Evaluation Unit made to substantiate its own presence.

I next turn to the evaluation technologies which the Evaluation Unit themselves adopted. These technologies themselves did not cause the submerging of the moral and political issues. But I show how evaluation steps helped shape the discourse toward performance aims and away from what Lave and Wenger (1991) have called “the relations among people in activity” (p.50). A key evaluation technology which the Department sought strenuously to have its staff follow I have called the “Generic Template Logic” (in order to reduce identifiability). The Generic Template Logic (GTL) was seen to fit well with the predominantly productivist focus of the Department’s goals, productivist as in the potential to bring about a focus on increasing productivity. It was this unit of production which was elevated as the value measure of the transformation expected of the producer. This played a role in limiting the thinking about change, and it particularly limited a focus on the importance of relations among the key people involved in the project, which themselves make the essential contribution to the unit of production. A number of forces acted together to assist the presentation of the rational organization focused in large part on productivity devoid of its relational qualities. These forces included the emphasis on the market, the production emphasis of the program logic, on the heightened attention to the upper levels only of the GTL, levels which facilitated the standardization of categories from which particularly the communication requirements of the Department could be drawn. Overriding
these subtle, incremental inter-linkages, was the strong need for the Department to control both its operations and its image.

As in other parts of the thesis, I argue here that, through an understanding of Object Relations theory, the role played by evaluation can be seen as providing some measure of comfort in the face of otherwise uncontainable anxiety about complexity, and in so doing formed a part of a systemic defence against these unwelcome and uncomfortable experiences. To the extent that evaluation served this function, it may be considered to have assisted the Department to defend against the pressures it faced, in a way which can be seen as a form of collusion, and in so doing, acted to the detriment of the producers. I use the word collusion not in the ordinary sense of to ‘act in secret concert’ (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 2002), but more in the meaning used in the systems psychodynamics literature, in which it is described as an “out of awareness, repetitive pattern of interaction between people, instigated in such a way as to manage and master anxiety” (Kets de Vries, 1999, p.749). Evaluation came to serve two interrelated functions. In helping the organization meet its need for information for communication purposes, it also helped the organization build a system of social defence against the immense discomfort of uncertainty and ambiguity.

The key issues raised in this chapter are set out in Figure 12 below.
### Figure 12  Summary of key processes and events in chapter 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignettes/Issues</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Event/Process</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation Unit level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue (6.2.1)</strong></td>
<td>Infusion of return on investment rhetoric in Evaluation Unit’s business case</td>
<td>Documentation setting out rationale for evaluation in the Department</td>
<td>Prior to study period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette1 (6.2.1)</td>
<td>Infusion of market ideas into evaluation discourse</td>
<td>Argument put forward by leader of the Evaluation Unit about the lack of return on more intensive, engaged, evaluative research methods</td>
<td>Feb, Yr 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue (6.3.3; 6.3.4)</strong></td>
<td>Diffusion of Generic Template Logic within Department Its diffusion to other Departments</td>
<td>Difficulties experienced with more complex program logic The encouragement of the use of the GTL through seminars at which the GTL author himself promoted the framework The promotion by senior managers of GTL Lack of promoting any alternatives</td>
<td>Yrs 1, 2 &amp;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette2 (6.4.2)</td>
<td>The abstract case for the integration of Evaluation and Communication</td>
<td>Arguments put forward by leader of the Evaluation Unit as to the utility of Evaluation for Communication purposes</td>
<td>Dec, Yr 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette3 (6.4.3)</td>
<td>The concrete case for the utility of Generic Template Logic – its informational utility</td>
<td>Specific demonstration of a favourable organizational response to the use of Generic Template Logic (GTL) Direction by Portfolio Manager to MI project team to use GTL</td>
<td>Dec, Yr 1 Yr 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue (6.5.2)</strong></td>
<td>GTL facilitating the omission of other contributions to project outcomes</td>
<td>The removal of detail from the MI project reporting which was not attributable to the MI project activity</td>
<td>Yr 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue (6.5.3)</strong></td>
<td>GTL facilitating the inclusion of outcome detail where outcomes were not related to project activity</td>
<td>The difficulty in including in the project reporting, adequate description and analysis of data which adequately distinguished between two different sources of product consignment</td>
<td>Yr 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue (6.6)</strong></td>
<td>Additional support for the critique of GTL from outside this research</td>
<td>The location of published research on the reification of GTL within the Department</td>
<td>Yr 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.2 Departmental evaluation discourse: the Market State

#### 6.2.1 A market influenced rationale for evaluation

I use the word discourse as an understanding of “frameworks of knowledge in the form of written, spoken, performed and enacted cultural conversations and representations that function...
as authoritative ways of describing that divide up the world in particular ways (Phillips, 2001, p.56).

I suggest that an examination of the ways in which evaluation was written about, spoken about and enacted by the Evaluation Unit itself, illuminates the dominance of the Market ideology within the public sector, and points to at least an understanding of how this ideology affected what Lave and Wenger (1991) call “the relations among people in activity” (p.50). To reinvoke the Swiss cheese image, the various layers of cheese mirror the layers of the complexity in this case study, where each layer, where it has or develops a particular weakness or valency to move in one direction (for example more toward a North-South orientation) rather than another (such as an East-West relational orientation), contributes to the overall harmful outcomes. The evaluation technologies in themselves, in other hands, in other circumstances, need not have made the negative contributions I experienced them as making, contributions in which I was a participant. However in the context particularly of the forces in the North-South axis, they played a role in the skewing of the outcome toward the needs of the North-South axis, at the expense of those on the East-West axis.

In Figure 13 below, I set out the three points used by the Evaluation Unit in its own business case, in which it documented its own role as follows:

**Figure 13 Evaluation’s case for its contribution to departmental functioning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation helps projects provide credible evidence of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• return on investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• meeting the requirements of customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• process improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While I had read the Evaluation Unit’s business case in its application for funding, I had not given these documents the attention they deserved. It is clear from these documents the extent to which they are infused with Market rhetoric.

I heard the link between evaluation and ROI toward the end of Year 1 of the MI project, when I participated in the evaluation training offered by the Evaluation Unit to its staff who were engaged in a variety of its projects. At this training, the leader of the Evaluation Unit informed
those assembled for Evaluation training that “with the purchaser provider model, we have become more concerned with impact…it’s a change in the Department’s vision of what success looks like – impact, return on investment”.

A few months after the evaluation training, another exchange between the leader of the Evaluation Unit and Departmental staff further highlighted the ROI discourse.

**Vignette 1: Return on investment versus producer particularity**

The account in this vignette is based on some follow up documentation from a Departmental workshop I attended early in my time with the MI project. The workshop presenter’s research (SC 18; SC 19) focused on the relationship between producer attitudes and aspirations, and their practices. The research possibly offered a guide to project staff in their work with the producers in government programs.

This vignette demonstrates the apparent ease with which arguments for evaluation could readily adopt the market discourse.

In corresponding with workshop participants a few weeks after the event, the leader of the Evaluation Unit supplemented his summary of the day with the following statement.

> The group [who attended the meeting] agreed the evaluation and measurement of attitudes and aspirations was important in understanding and maximising adoption, that this understanding needed to be analysed in the context of producer decision making process, [but that this approach] required skills which probably do not exist [within the Department] at the moment, and could be expensive to do well, and decisions need to be made at what point it becomes economically viable to proceed with this type of analysis.

**Discussion of Vignette 1: the ROI rhetoric**

The correspondence from the leader of the Evaluation Unit brought home to me the strength of the return on investment discourse within the Department, and as time elapsed, helped me see more clearly the impact on the evaluation presence in an environment in which the task of understanding the cultural context of the producer in his enterprise receded in the face of the view that such a pursuit was not seen to be economically viable in Departmental administrative terms. The idea that more “economically viable” options needed to be explored, I now see as an instrumental rationality – instrumental in its capacity to focus on one particular requirement, in
this case an economic efficiency, at the expense of, or to the exclusion of, other values. How to understand a complex endeavour like a family in their production enterprise, in an economically viable manner, remains unanswered in this vignette. However, I deduce from the high use of market research in the evaluation training, and in the recommendation from the Evaluation Unit to projects to consider in their evaluation work, that market research was one approach which did seem economically viable. At the time I was involved with the Department, the Evaluation Unit was using the Code of Ethics of Market Research practice, as its code for evaluation practice. Market research was certainly an approach which could reach a high number of people, particularly its application of “computer assisted telephone interviewing” (CATI), one of its main uses in the Department.

At the same time, such methodologies are not expected to attend to matters of complex cultural understandings. They are also essentially monologic methods (Schwandt, 1997b) and in this mode, further widen the gap between the data collected and any nuanced understanding of relational practice. The social nature of both direct practices with producers, and evaluation of such intervention, is lost particularly in such high volume, no doubt “economically viable” market research methods.

Figure 13 above, which sets out the Evaluation Unit’s own business case, highlights that evaluation also contributes to departmental functioning by helping provide credible evidence of meeting the needs of customers, and also of process improvement. I will only point to the possibility that with the word “customer” the intent was to highlight the needs and issues of the program client, which was my initial presumption. However, the customer (for the evaluation effort) became the Department, a perspective which is the story of this thesis.

The other claim, that evaluation provides credible evidence of process improvement, has the hallmarks of what I refer to and explain in the next chapter, which is a “virtue word” or phrase – a term from advertising (Siever, 1998) denoting the use of a word or phrase to conjure up an image of something good, or sought after. “Evaluation” cannot bring into being a demonstration of process improvement if the relationships between the parties in a project cannot sustain a process conversation, and hear each other’s perspectives in such a way that critical learning can flow from this engagement. The reader has enough examples of the difficulty experienced at all levels of the project environment in terms of conversation about “process improvement” from the previous chapter not to labour this point.
6.3 Program logic: the attraction of Generic Template Logic (GTL)

6.3.1 Introduction

A key platform in the Department’s evaluation approach is ‘program theory evaluation’. The particular form of program logic which has gained ascendancy within the Department is the GTL.

A program theory is generally thought of as the explicit assumptions about how the program is expected to work.

Program theory evaluation consists of an explicit theory or model of how a program causes the intended or observed outcomes and an evaluation that is at least partly guided by this model… Different terms have been used for this type of evaluation, including outcomes hierarchy (Bennett, 1975) and theory of action (Schon, 1997). More commonly, the terms program theory (Bickman, 1987, 1990), theory based evaluation (Weiss, 1995, 1997) and program logic (Lenne and Cleland, 1987, Funnell, 1997), have been used (Rogers et al, 2000, p.5).

When I participated in the first evaluation training conducted by the Departmental Evaluation Unit at the end of Year 1, a considerable time was set aside to introduce ‘program logic’. This session was taken by a leading person in evaluation in Australia whose writing and practice in program logic is well known (SC 9). Her approach suggests program planners or program members would be well served to seek out patterns in the characteristics of different program types, out of which can be drawn different outcomes hierarchies, thereby making explicit the different cause and effect mechanisms. I observed that staff in the workshop appeared to experience the session as complicated. Another interpretation of the staff reaction to the program logic proposed at this training session (personal communication, 2004) was that staff found it time consuming and not to be of sufficient benefit to them. The leader of the Evaluation Unit would often refer to the ‘spaghetti’ diagrams program staff would draw to try to encompass the logic of their project using this more complete approach first introduced in this evaluation training. My discussion here is not to report definitively on the rationale for abandoning this more complex approach to program logic (this would be an interesting piece of research in its own right) but to emphasise how quickly models such as what was presented were dispensed with and another form of program logic introduced. Whatever the reasons for the difficulties with the presented model, within a relatively short period of time, the Evaluation Unit leader
introduced the GTL as the dominant model for the program logic, and it became the approach used across Department programs.

6.3.2: Introduction to GTL

Before putting forward a critical account of the rationale given for the introduction of the GTL, I will briefly summarise its key features, set out in Figure 14 below. A fuller representation of the GTL as developed in the MI project, is located at (Suppressed) Appendix 1, with its identifying detail removed.

GTL shows a series of specific intended program inputs, outputs and outcomes, in a stepped order. It was first placed in the literature in 1975 (SC 4). The description of GTL given in a Departmental memo at the end of Year 1 inviting staff to a workshop with the person who had developed GTL noted that it

\[\text{describes a chain of events assumed to characterize most programs in[this area]. It uses this chain of events to depict a hierarchy of objectives and evidence for program evaluation. The GTL represents a framework for a goal based approach to evaluation.}\]

The Evaluation Unit did modify the GTL to include “research and development” findings and “dissemination” of such findings. Relevant data for these two categories is exemplified in the GTL set out in Appendix 1.

At the highest level, the End Results of project inputs and participants are recorded. While in the MI project, these end results were quantified in monetary terms ($X value of product sold), there is potentially room in the model for social and environmental outcomes as well. So while the potential is there for the highest level of the GTL to focus on a breath of outcomes, the thesis discusses the factors which shape reporting toward certain “productivist” outcomes. At a lower level is recorded the participants' practice change as a result of their participation typically in the program. As one further descends the logic model the categories of data become more instrumental, as they also have to account for the resources which are supplied through the project, and some detail of its activities, details which can be seen as the "inputs" of the educator. At the first and lowest level, educators commit "inputs" of time, money and other resources.

A typical straightforward example of the utility of GTL to a standard “technology transfer” situation may be taken from a dairy extension program. It may be an established fact, for
example, that the administration, at the right time, in the right amounts, of a particular pasture fertiliser has a direct link to an increase in milk production. This increased milk production can then be linked to an economic outcome at the individual level for the farmer and, as I became more aware over time, more importantly, linked to an economic outcome for the State. This is not to say that it does not require particular skill and knowledge to run a project in which such clear-cut outcomes can be achieved, nor that State level outcomes are unimportant. The point I wish to make is that in an extension project, such as the fertiliser example, there is a more demonstrable link between staff activities and outcomes for farmers and the State. In rethinking this link between activities and outcomes, it is not difficult to see how issues which fall outside this frame of reference, outside the presumed direction of the technology transfer, receive less attention. In the same project, for example, it would be less likely that staff would also be examining concerns about whether it was sustainable to keep pushing the link between milk production levels and fertilizers. This is not to say data could not be collected on such matters. It is just to say that where the incentives lie in this sort of project, are with creating successful outcomes in the direction in which the GTL is structured. One would usually not seek to specifically collect data which did not form part of the presumed immediate, and sought after, causal chain, a chain in which productivity, in the particular product area, is a key outcome. As the leader of the Evaluation Unit states in his memo to staff inviting them to the workshop with the GTL creator, the GTL “points the way to the performance information required”.

6.3.3 The diffusion of GTL

Diffusion, a key idea in agricultural extension, now accounts for a vast literature (Rogers, 2003). It examines the processes through which new technologies are taken up, including analyses of who takes them up, and the factors which facilitate their take up. Another related literature looks at diffusion of organizational forms, as studied by the institutional theorists (Strang & Meyer, 1993; Scott & Meyer, 1994). That evaluation forms could be thought of a field of study themselves, as to how and why they are taken up in the way they are, was an emergent finding of this thesis. I have offered one explanation in this thesis, that these forms assist organizations defensively manage their program environments, through in part the appearance of cohesion which is rendered by an overprescriptive and essentially defensive approach, enacted proactively, to managing and representing an account of its programs.

There was certainly no time lost in the Department between what I perceived as the anxiety inherent in the “spaghetti diagrams”, and the implementation across the Department of GTL.
Senior staff sent email communication to project leaders about the GTL which could only be regarded as their strong preference for its use in any program evaluation in the Department. This email provided detail of the GTL, and also sources for further information about the GTL. No other evaluation frameworks were included in this correspondence. GTL was the only model of program logic I witnessed in use throughout my time in the Department after my attendance at the initial evaluation training.

One of the stated aims listed on the staff invitation to attend the workshop with the author of the GTL, was to “encourage participants to consider the use of the GTL in their [Evaluation] work”. So while one could not say that GTL was forced upon Project Managers, the clear message was that it was the preferred approach to program logic.

I struggled with the use of the GTL within my work with the MI project. When I would voice my frustration with it, the response from the project leaders was that “[the Senior Executive] likes GTL”. The environment was not conducive to questioning the approach, and I was unable to offer an alternative. However, these dissatisfactions were not part of a critical public discussion of the Department’s approach to evaluation, and several other agencies (SC 11; SC 20) have adopted GTL.

I have seen considerable evidence of the diffusion to other organizations of the GTL as a program logic of choice. One such example (SC 20) is a health care agency which publicly promotes, in its own documentation, this Department’s use of evaluation. The agency adopts the Department’s claims for its own purposes, and portrays how it can use this Department’s experience in evaluation in its own field of practice. This agency also promotes the use of GTL as their own logic model of choice, due to the apparent success of the evaluation approach developed in the Department.

### 6.3.4 Overuse of GTL

The MI project was not in the main, an educational extension program, although there were elements of education in the workshops and other forums staff held for producers, particularly in relation to the promotion of advanced product marketing methods and methods of product testing at the site of production (SC 3). One of its key goals was to see to the establishment of a product supply company. Considering the more enterprising nature of the MI project, there were at least two differences from the above fertilizer/milk production causal logic. The first
difference between the MI project, and the logic underpinning GTL, was that the behaviour expected of the ‘customers’, customers as producers in this discussion, was not going to be linked necessarily to the MI project directly, except to the extent that without the program, the opportunity for producers to market their product in this exact way would not have been possible. That is, the linear relationship between the activities (the intervention) and the expected outcome was far less direct and clear than in the fertilizer example provided above. Producers did not necessarily need an ‘education program’ on marketing, as they might have needed in the fertiliser example, where in that example, part of the producers’ learning was to understand how, when and in what volume to apply a particular fertiliser in order to achieve an increased milk production. The MI project producers could be very knowledgeable about marketing (and some of them were), and decide if they wished to participate based on factors other than the delivery of an educational message – such as a belief in the need for a paradigm shift away from the dominant method of selling. Their involvement could have been (and in my experience often was) on the basis of beliefs at this more ‘macro’ level.

The second difference from the underpinning logic of GTL as a casual model, was that the model did not deal well with ‘emergence’, with unpredictable outcomes.

I don’t necessarily think one needs a model, or a tool, to describe or represent an activity and its relationship to an outcome, particularly where emergent properties are expected, and relied on. It is possible that the GTL could have been used to develop and document ideas about some of the ways in which some of the program activities were out of alignment with the producers’ actual needs and interests. Alternate models and discourses could have been developed.

I cannot say how the author of GTL expected his model to be used, or whether he was concerned about any possible ‘misuse’, or over ascribing of his intent. I did have the opportunity to ask him during his visit at the end of Year 1 what he saw to be some of the gaps in the field in which the model was developed, which impinged on evaluation. He answered that he didn’t think enough was known about the producers’ views and circumstances in relation to their adoption of new practices. This view was shared by other researchers in this field (SC 18, SC 19), whose work was referred to earlier. This gap can be thought of as being a conceptual gap on the East-West axis of the Compass model, which to me makes it particularly ironic how much the GTL became a dominant tool of the North-South axis.

But I came to the view that a predominance of ‘productivist’ language in the MI project was a misconceptualization, given what I came to see as the project’s actual dependence in large part
on the quality of relationships between the parties as the means to achieve its outcomes. What is necessary is the capacity of the work group itself to form a good enough, even temporary, organizational property, something of a holding environment, discussed earlier, which they themselves constitute, in order to discuss and make meaning together of the nature of the emergent property, how it might be conceptualized, and what this might mean for the work roles and the group tasks as they had understood them up to that time. Of course it may be particularly helpful for some individuals to be able to represent this visually (i.e., diagrammatically, as in a program logic outline), but this task in itself can be considered an emergent property of the struggle to conceptualize a project, rather than something that can be planned for or imposed as a template, ahead of time. In the last chapter of the thesis, I return to the requirements for individuals and groups in work environments to be able to function as a ‘container’ for the work, rather than objectifying this requirement into a rigid model.

As Muetzelfeldt (2003) has noted, the governance of production is driven in such a way that it “catches up within itself all relevant practices, including those that would conventionally be ascribed to…civil society” (p.11). I would like to add a dimension to Muetzelfeldt’s comment about catching up within the governance of production, all relevant practices, by stating that in addition to catching up these practices, it then subsumes and “disappears” those practices which might be seen as more conventionally ascribed to civil society. The practices which were disappeared, were predominantly relational ones – staff with staff, staff with project client, and while Muetzelfeldt may say these relationships might be more conventionally ascribed to civil society, I would argue, as does Fletcher (1998), as well as the large body of systems psychodynamic literature, that these relationships are the mechanisms of work – this is how the work gets done, through relationships. This becomes particularly pronounced in new ventures where the relationships are not preexisting.

There was nothing intrinsically oppressive about the GTL model per se. But if it wasn’t a good model for a project like MI, it would be reasonable to conclude that it may not have been a good model for several other programs and projects within the Department. This then raises the question: to whom was it so attractive, and why was this so? Does this tell us something about the “dominant forces shaping evaluation practice”? I address these questions in the next section.
6.4 The benefits of GTL

6.4.1 Introduction

To gain insight into the way in which evaluation came to be used within the Department, and what sorts of tensions existed to skew these particular emphases, we should take account of the reasons given for the use of evaluation by a range of parties. Saunders (2000) appears to have this in mind in making the following statement:

Following Giddens we need to take account of the way people at work operate within sets of routinised practices. It is these practices which will determine the way in which people spend their working day, prioritize activities, and decide what is worth spending time on and what is not. …Most importantly, an evaluation framework will be used or not used depending on how it "fits" with these incentives, as well as how it fits with any particular community of practice of evaluators (p.14).

I take up Saunders’ challenge next and show what were some of the relevant work practices in which evaluation sought to fit. These practices were particularly the Department’s requirements for reporting and communication mechanisms, and the need to integrate the evaluation work with these requirements. In so doing, I believe I show how this reduced the likelihood that evaluation would take up a more inquiring exploratory role.

6.4.2 Vignette 2 – Arguing for integrating Evaluation and Communication

The context for this and the next vignette arises from communication between members of the group which was convened to plan Departmental evaluation training. I will call this group the Evaluation Training Planning Group. As a student I was able to be present at these meetings, typically in an observational role.

I have separated the two vignettes, this and the following one, to highlight two strands of this process of pushing the use of GTL as the dominant logic model. The first strand is the perception that the GTL strengthens the Department’s capacity to assist in aggregation of data across the Department’s programs. The second strand highlights its utility as evidenced by Departmental responses to an actual case example of its use.
In an email setting out the agenda for a meeting of the Evaluation Training Planning Group, the Leader of the Evaluation Unit advised us that the ‘evaluation training’ also had to hold within it, necessary (corporate) demands from the organizational environment. He noted that “evaluation provides the fodder for the communication plan”, and that there was a need to integrate two aspects of a project, being Evaluation and Communication. Due to this, the evaluation training program would therefore need to have a segment on a “report back system…. for the Division”. I didn’t question at that time what meaning was being implied in the word “communication”. I thought then that the call was for information which could be used particularly for public relations, and I also experienced this as a dominant requirement for information during my involvement with the MI project.

In his correspondence to the Evaluation Training Planning Group, the leader of the Evaluation Unit proposed two possibilities to structure the link between Evaluation and the Department’s corporate need for material for Communication. One possibility was the production of case studies, the other, the development of a reporting ‘template’. His preference was for the ‘template’, and in putting his arguments as to his particular preference for the GTL as the template, he showed its particular utility in reporting ‘up the hierarchy’. In making the case for the adoption of GTL as the preferred template, he saw that it could “facilitate the systematic collection of information throughout the life of a sub-project or project to assist decision making by internal stakeholders”. In addition, GTL was regarded as valuable in “facilitating the ready aggregation of information at a key project level for reporting at that level…By having some commonality (not total) this would enable people to examine data from a number of subprojects and make overall judgments about a key project” (a key project being an aggregation of sub projects). The GTL could also “provide subproject data reports for compilation into a final report and hopefully reduce the sometimes onerous nature of this task”. Finally, it could “provide a communication tool for telling the overall “story” of a piece of work”.

Vignette 2 – Discussion

As I reflect on the requirements placed on the leader of the Evaluation Unit, I get the sense of a voracious organization, unable to let something new, like an evaluation component, find its feet, with integrity, before getting sucked into its vortex, as in a whirlpool, or its vertex, meaning toward its apex, being the North point of the Compass model.

It would be fair to say that none of us within the Evaluation Training Planning Group raised the possibility that there may be dissonance between the project story as it emerged through an
evaluation process, and the requirements of a communication plan. This possibility wasn’t
discounted. It was just not considered. The Evaluation Training Planning Group, myself
included, may have been avoiding confronting these difficulties as it struggled with the possible
complexity, and confronting nature, of delivering evaluation training to the Department, while, at
the same time, maintaining a cohesive, credible presence as evaluation trainers.

It seems on reflection that if the possibility of evaluation producing uncomfortable results wasn’t
raised as a relevant consideration by the (Evaluation Training) Planning Group, it was even less
likely that this prospect would be proposed by an ‘ordinary’, ‘on the ground’ member of the
Department. With the connection then established between the GTL and the reporting
framework, the next small, barely visible incremental link in the “rationality project” (Stone,
1998) had been proposed and put into place – evaluation serves as fodder for the communication
plan.

6.4.3 Vignette 3 An example of GTL informational utility

This vignette builds on the previous vignette, and demonstrates the importance to senior
executives of the ability of the GTL framework to assist particularly with Departmental reporting
functions. These reporting functions are a key driver in the performative North-South axis; the
leader of the Evaluation Unit emphasizes these favourable attributes in his arguments to
Departmental staff, and the Portfolio Manager emphasizes to us in the MI project that we need to
follow what became the celebrated exemplar of a successful use of GTL as a reporting tool.

The Evaluation Unit leader argued that the GTL could facilitate the ‘ready aggregation of
information’ at the project and program level (an argument used by the leader of the Evaluation
Unit in the previous vignette), and provided an example of how this could be achieved to those
assembled for evaluation training. In telling the (Evaluation Training) Planning Group that he
needed to have more time on the evaluation training program agenda under ‘management’ than
had been planned for, he said that he was going to do a joint presentation to the course attendees
together with the head of Corporate Communications. The leader of the Evaluation Unit wrote:
“[The Head of Corporate Communications] and I are going to talk about an on-going reporting
framework – I will be using the Program A example, which was a first trial…”

Interestingly, the senior officer in the Department responsible for the management of Program A
told me that he had been “taken aback” by the (positive) “airplay” that this small piece of
internally managed telephone survey research had received. The project funder of Project A had
carried out a telephone survey of project coordinators. These coordinators were typically producers and were usually known to the funder who did the survey. The survey results were presented to the Departmental senior executive group in the format of GTL. The leader of the Evaluation Unit said that these senior staff had been ‘sold’ on the reporting framework. Those who were said to be “sold” on the reporting framework were the senior executive of the Department, and the producer based organization who was a funding partner in Program A. The Evaluation Training Planning Group did not question the wish of the leader of the Evaluation Unit to proceed in this manner, with this case illustration of the success of the GTL, presumably seeing, as I did, that it was his prerogative to decide how he intended to manage and “guide” the introduction of a framework for project reporting. The leader of the Evaluation Unit proceeded to inform those at evaluation training of the occurrence of this favourable example, and argued for the adoption of the GTL as an evaluation tool which could serve these purposes.

Some months after this presentation by the leader of the Evaluation Unit on the merits of the GTL, the Portfolio Manager, in the product group of programs in which MI was located, made it clear to the MI project members, and in particularly to the Evaluation Working Group, that we should emulate the style of reporting used in the Program A example referred to above. He used similar, albeit more colourful arguments to those advanced by the Evaluation Unit leader. His version of events was that when the Department’s senior executive group saw the report of the Program A (which was in his Portfolio), set out in the GTL framework, the ‘top deck went ape-shit’ (the “top deck” meaning the senior executive, and “ape shit” signifying a particularly positive response.) In addition to emphasising the logical presentation of the data through the use of the GTL, the Portfolio Manager also emphasised an additional benefit of the GTL to his way of thinking: that the presentation fitted onto one PowerPoint slide.

Vignette 3 – Discussion

The retrospective analysis of processes I observed which led to the adoption of the GTL was valuable learning for me. It demonstrates to me the difficulty of understanding, “in the moment” when processes are flowing along at considerable speed, where the acts of logic are hard to question, where in the pragmatic world of every day organizational life, the notion of meeting two sets of organizational requirements in the one activity holds considerable appeal. And while the example used [Program A] may have been considered rather problematic in terms of research methodology, it was a program known to be valued by producers. While I can see now that the elements of rigidity and possible abuse of its intended function were present at the outset of the use of the GTL, they were not so easy to see at the time.
Experience and further research has shown that it is reasonable to conclude that the seeds of concern were in fact present at the outset. One more obvious example of this is the “powerpoint appeal” voiced by the Project Manager. The appeal of this reductionist approach which assumes coherence, cannot be underestimated in this performative climate with little tolerance for complexity or ambiguity.

Some more complex tensions however were present in the Evaluation Unit leader’s role. He presented as keen to support what could be regarded as a managerialist requirement – the desire to facilitate the GTL as a framework to help generate the tidy, orderly, generic templates, for (managerial) use in project reporting. These North-South requirements could be placed against the requirement for evaluation practice to elicit, if not manage, the multiple and contested issues encountered in any one project intervention (Greene, 2002; Schwandt, 2003b). This sets up a professional tension in the Evaluation leader’s role. It was certainly a tension in my evaluation coordinator’s role. The GTL framework assisted in the shaping of a neat, goal oriented and goal satisfying, uncontested program picture, which was of particular use at the senior level of the organization. The “rough ground” which Schwandt (2003a) speaks of, the engagement with actual program realities, is carefully excluded in such accounts.

6.5 GTL performativity at the Project level

6.5.1 Introduction

To date I have argued that the attractions of the GTL can be best summarized as assisting with the demands created by the performativity which is a particular concern of the North-South administrative axis, with its requirement for project data for communication purposes. At this higher organizational level (such as at the senior executive level), the separation (or de-coupling) of lived experience in the process of making abstractions from data for information purposes maintains a degree of resilience, because it is hard to question. However, at the project level, the experience is different. Here it is not so easy to slide into the abstract data category. This has to be brought about; individual practitioners have to make concrete decisions about what to include or exclude, what fits a template and what doesn’t. In this section, I would like to examine:

- What are the implications of the use of the GTL for projects which do not fit within the generic project framework implied in the model?
- What implications arise for the evaluation of projects where significant amounts of data are excluded from the reporting framework of the GTL?
Before linking these issues more explicitly to the idea of a social defence against anxiety, I present two examples of findings from the experience with the GTL at the project level. The first example is that the GTL encouraged a focus on project-centric activities, ignoring other contextual factors which impacted on outcomes. The second example is the propensity of the GTL in this performative climate, to fail to distinguish between alternative pathways in analysis. The GTL encouraged a lessening of attention to these other ways of examining project outcomes.

6.5.2 The omission of detail on contributions to project outcomes

As an aid to an understanding of this next section, I will restate a key focus of the MI project. That project focus was the producers’ practice of marketing their product. The project sought to change the marketing practices of those producers who were interested in doing so, on the basis that the usual means of marketing was seen to distance the producer from the purchaser/processor. The new marketing practices being promoted included the use of MI as a form of direct selling to processors. It was anticipated that there would be additional learnings for producers arising from the new relationship with processors.

The evaluation and project staff faced a difficulty in recording the work of the project. The project was being delivered into a complex marketing environment. In every day life for producers, the MI project was just one of several channels through which the producer could choose to sell his product. Producers are subject to a myriad of different advertising initiatives in relation to marketing. Among the many avenues for marketing other than the dominant current system are marketing schemes operated by major industry players such as the large broking houses, online selling, the use of futures contracts, and other forms of forward selling. How did the GTL address this complexity? The logical underpinning in the GTL is the attribution of links between project activities and producer practices. Making this assumption of a direct link between the learning of a producer and his participation in a particular project, in this dynamic marketing environment, is simplistic in the extreme. As one member of the MI Advisory Committee said to me, the Department should accept that it “needs to give up on attribution”, meaning attributing behavioural change to its programs alone. Not to do so raises serious questions about the validity of such evaluation methods.

However, to assist this all important task of attribution of behaviour change to Departmental projects, the GTL shapes a recording of only those project resources which were directly
controlled by the project. I see this as an understandable Departmental tendency. It was these resources, after all, which were being accounted for by the Department.

When the MI project manager first started to speak to producers about the MI project, he did so by seeking an invitation to monthly meetings of the producers who were participating in groups run by another Departmental project that worked with producers. These groups were therefore an important resource to the MI project, as they provided a ready-made forum for the Project Manager to start to seek producer interest. As project evaluation coordinator, I would write the name of this other project in the lowest level of the GTL as a “resource”. This would be removed from the template as the project leaders corrected drafts. Only the resources and inputs of the MI project were accepted. Other resources were excluded. It is not difficult to see why other resources are excluded in an environment where both the success and the accountability needed to be sheeted back to a particular resource. The use of the GTL, in this performative climate, logically lent itself to such stripping away of other factors of relevance to the life of a project, including the contribution of other projects, even if these projects are part of the same organization or Department.

6.5.3 Distortion: Failure to distinguish alternate pathways in analysis

The second example I draw attention to in discussing the inevitable simplification and hence distortion in the reporting of project outcomes, such as occurred with the simplistic use of the GTL as the reporting framework, is the failure to distinguish between alternate pathways in analysis. While the examples given already in this chapter accentuated the emphasis on recording only MI activities, this account provides an example of a related tendency – the recording of non project resources as if they had performed the same function as the MI resources.

This illustration of the shaping tendencies of the GTL is taken from my experience interpreting some Market Research carried out in which MI project producers were represented.

In this research, the clients of the MI project, were joined with as research subjects with that group of producers who belonged to the cooperative. Both groups had contributed product to the consignments, but differed as to the means through which that product was gained. For the MI project producers, the means through which they learned of the MI project was the MI project staff – a direct link between the lowest levels of the GTL (inputs/resources) and the higher levels (contributing some of their product – ie, changing their usual practices). For the cooperative
producers, this link did not exist. The work of informing this group of producers of the aims and methods used in the MI project to market product, including gaining the producer’s permission for their product to become part of the MI project, was work done largely by the staff of a cooperative, not the staff of the MI project.

This piece of Market Research demonstrated a fundamental flaw in the GTL, or the way in which the Department used the GTL within the performative organizational climate. An assumption of the GTL is that Project outcomes were related to the project staff resources, not to other resources outside the project. An assumption is also made that the targets of the project, the producers, would be the ones whose participation arose from the work of the project. In the case of the cooperative, these producers contributed product to the project through means other than the initiatives of the staff.

The Evaluation Working Group was required to interpret the results of Market Research carried out with the two groups of producers, those who were the clients of the MI project, and those who were the clients of the cooperative. One question producers were asked in the market research, for example, was their satisfaction with their sources of information about the MI project. As explained, there were different sources of information for each group. In order to make meaningful interpretations of the market research, I undertook considerable work with the agency which carried out the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) market research, to ‘tag’ the two groups, so as I could distinguish them on analysis. While the market research files were returned to me, with the two groups tagged, I did not ever utilize this additional data differentiated this way. This was for a number of reasons. The project did not receive ongoing funding, and there was a dramatic decrease in interest in the results of the market research when they came to hand. Motions of project closure were being enacted. Concerns about the issue of how to meaningfully interpret the results derived from the two quite distinct groups in terms of “program treatment”, fell on deaf ears. By the time the market research report was completed, the distance of the project parties from each other was marked: producers from staff, MI Advisory Committee from each other and from the project leadership, the project leaders from each other. There was little capacity for dialogue. Those of us still involved were past dealing with these finer points of logic and interpretation. The actual differences in the two groups, their status as “resources” or “activities” in the GTL, were just a few more details which “got disappeared” (Fletcher, 1998) in the steps in the GTL.
6.6 Other research evidence on Departmenal use of GTL

Toward the end of my candidature, I located a PhD thesis in which the field work had been carried out within the same Department. This thesis provided some support for some of my findings about the way in which evaluation was being used within the Department. I will call the PhD author “B” (SC 5, 2004).

While I felt my own experience and interpretation of the role evaluation played within the Department was valid and fair, B’s thesis confirmed some of my findings, although I brought a different theoretical perspective to bear on the reasons the evaluation component of the Department’s work had become so idealized. The project ‘B’ was researching sought to develop cooperative approaches between extension agents, land managers and other stakeholders, to issues of land management. I would see this work as having some resonance on the East-West axis of the Compass model. This project had fewer tangible outcomes to measure than changes in productivity. The project sought to encourage relational connections between the key parties as the basis for change. It was explicitly both theoretically and practically, working on a systems perspective, and housed in an action research approach. B reported that the Department sought an evaluation of this project according to the GTL framework to meet organizational requirements. He also noted that the Evaluation Unit was well regarded by the Department.

B reported that it proved difficult to account for the project in what he saw as the more linear terms set out in the GTL. Some project members were in favour of following the GTL approach to evaluation, as the GTL was seen to “provide legitimacy and credibility to the project within the organization”. B reported that members were influenced by the argument put by the Department to the project, that as the GTL was the approach used by the Department, through the use of the GTL, “projects could talk to each other” (SC 5, p.121) and be compared and was therefore the desirable model to follow. B also reported that some members of the project team were influenced by what was perceived to be the high status of the Evaluation Unit within the Department.

Some members of B’s project saw that after they began to account for the project in terms of the GTL, their language changed. For example, B reported that the language of the community as a key user of the project, an explicit East-West axis concern, was gradually supplanted with the language of extension agents as key users, changes that B in her analysis sheeted home to the use of the GTL. She noted that one of the key issues project staff were trying to achieve was to keep the community and the extension practitioners together as actors engaged in mutually shaping their interventions. B reported that GTL changed these associations and hence practices in their
project. She found that the “use of GTL validated the project in the organization, at the expense of differentiation and change” (p.125).

I found I had some agreement with B, on two counts. I agreed with her finding that the GTL was skewing the reporting of projects, and also her observation that the evaluation unit was well regarded within the Department. I found however that I disagreed with her on the arguments she associated with these two findings. I go further in my analysis of GTL, and have argued that in addition to skewing findings, in its efforts to manage uncertainty through simplification, it came to be used to operationalise a systemic defence against the anxiety which attends uncertainty, dependency and turbulence. My other difference was with her argument that due to the fact that evaluation was well regarded, that this regard held some hope that the Evaluation Unit could influence the way in which they are currently being used by the Department. I would argue that it is this very same high regard which affirms my perspective that it is performing a key (largely unconscious) organizational function as a systemic defence. This being so suggests in fact that it would be very difficult to change this function. To change its functioning would involve an acceptance of complexity, a willingness to face the highly contentious nature of its programming, and the desire and capacity to develop the means for encompassing such complexity within the evaluation approach, with the attendant uncertainty, anxiety and ambiguity this brings. This is a huge challenge in any organization, but particularly one operating in such a performative climate.

6.7 Discussion

Again, like many examples taken from the MI case, not one of these issues alone makes a case for what I have claimed were the distortions experienced which have been illuminated in the case study analysis. The distortions must be taken together, and examined for their overall impact on the system.

I came to see the GTL as forming part of an assemblage of ideas and practices, elements of what Stone (1988) would call the rationality project. The GTL became an element in a project management framework that emphasized calculable aspects of project life (Hodgson, 2002), where the emphases in the project management framework had a particular linearity, including timelines and deliverables, and the deliverables were required to be shaped in ways which were consistent with the productivist goals of the Department. These emphases had some affinity with the linear basis of the GTL. Linearity itself becomes ritualized in these processes, and as a
dominant way of thinking, becomes hard to question, further obscuring relational dimensions of
the work.

The systems psychodynamic literature became a powerful interpretive tool for me in further
understanding some of the impacts of the over use and uncritical use of evaluation technologies.
Gilmore and Krantz (1990) claim in their analysis of the social defences of managerialism and
the cult of the charismatic leader, that what is lost to the system is intelligence and functionality.
So too in this case study, there were losses associated with the requirement to dampen down
complexity, and to turn a blind eye to those aspects of the project which didn’t fit the
“rationality” paradigm. These were defences which were not clear at the time. It was only over
time that the defensive patterns of evaluation and program management became clearer. It was
only with the containment and support of the post field work research, that I was able to come to
see the losses of intelligence and functionality more clearly.

I now regard the speed of adoption of the GTL as a particular form of program logic, and its
uncritical use, as a response to an organizational climate in which the drivers of performativity
left little time for critical reflection, and left the Evaluation Unit under great pressure to deliver
something manageable for Project Managers to follow, in order to meet the requirement of
mandatory evaluation. That evaluation itself became a mandatory activity is suggestive of a
coercive environment in which exploration of the implications of this decision, or of alternatives
to the decision, were not invited. It seemed to me, on reflection, that the anxiety surrounding the
task of the mandatory introduction of evaluation left little time to explore options which might
allow for more creativity and engagement by staff. While my status in these discussions as a
student interested in evaluation was minimal, I too colluded with this lack of questioning at least
during the evaluation training and during the short swift steps taken by the leader of the
Evaluation Unit, in the presence of the Evaluation Training Group, to set up the GTL as the logic
model of choice. Again, it seemed I had to experience its limitations, within a particular project
context, and to also experience its utility across the Division as a reporting mechanism, and to
experience the angst of those producers who felt their viewpoints were ignored by the
Department, to understand its limitations and its other conscious and unconscious functions.

When I started with the MI project, I was told many stories of how the programs in this product
group in particular, had undergone severe cuts. My experience with the Department was that
many of its programs lived with this threat. Lawrence (1995) makes the point that such threats
are not only experienced as real in everyday life in organizations, they are real. These are not
over reactions. The use of project reports containing a considerable amount of information
derived from evaluation work, were important as vehicles for Departmental communication. Such reports were a highly organized response to threat. What sort of environment was the Senior Executive facing which facilitated the level of organizing required for evaluation to function as such a systemic defence? What sort of environments do all public sector senior executives face? In chapter 7 I more fully explore the environment into which the Department projects itself, in order to appreciate how the evaluation served the Department in this regard.

6.8 Summary

In chapter 6 I have focused in more detail on the evaluation practice as argued for by the Leader of the Evaluation Unit, and in examining the arguments he put forward to support the case for Departmental expenditure on evaluation, have demonstrated two related ideas: one is the degree to which the evaluation discourse had become saturated with the language of the market state and the other idea is the function of evaluation in contributing to the formation of a social defence against anxiety. I see these two very broad threads as being in constant interaction.

These ideas were brought to life through an examination of a particular form of program logic, the GTL, and how this evaluation approach moved from being one of several possible ways to think about program logic, to being the organizationally preferred approach, which in turn, became ‘the’ approach. Its capacity to shape the provision of information in a certain way was problematic in at least two ways. It demonstrated a loss of intelligence of what actually happened in the MI project, and in so doing, contributed to the provision of a fabricated account of the project. The presence of a fabricated account is the antithesis of the notion of learning for future projects from past experience. The fabrication also disguised the reality that project participants were not able to engage in enough dialogue to result in ‘mutually beneficial relating’ (Gergen & McNamee, 1999). The converse was in fact true – relationships were harmed in the course of the project, and the fact that the evaluation made no mention of any of these issues, it served to further protect the fabrication. In this sense, it served as a systemic defence mechanism.
Chapter 7 Departmental Image Management

7.1 Introduction

My task in this chapter is to examine the nature of the wider system in which these acts of fabrication such as is symbolized in the Final Project Report, are embedded. What is the gaze which Ball (2003) suggests organizations, or parts of organizations, might want to avoid?

I approach the task of understanding the wider system into which evaluation is reporting, by examining the discourse used by the Senior Executive in his support of evaluation.

Power (1997) suggests that the presence of an accountability mechanism can also act as a form of defence. In researching auditing as an organizational process, he suggests that it has become a “ritualized practice of verification, whose technical efficiency is less significant than [its] role in the production of organizational legitimacy” (p.14). As Power says of audit – it is the “giving of an account, in order to avoid the giving of an account”. I believe this to be the case in relation to evaluation when it is linked strongly with the symbol of accountability. In this dominant prevailing orientation, evaluation has become colonized – its technologies shaped to fit the organicentric values (Dahler-Larsen, 2002). The message is: “one need look no further.” What is affirmed in this climate is what Ingersoll and Adams (1986) call the managerial meta-myth - the “rational technical orientation toward tasks and relationships” (p.362), prevails.

In my interpretation of the forces which shaped this project evaluation, a central mechanism by which the North-South axis retains or reinforces its dominance is through the use of the idea of ‘accountability’. Accountability is the dominant concern of the North-South performative axis in the Compass model, and it is the dominant stated reason, particularly by the Senior Executive within the Department, for the Department’s use of evaluation.

In Figure 14 below I provide an outline of the key issues discussion in this chapter.
### Figure 14  Summary of key processes and events in chapter 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignettes/Issues</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Event/Process</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **7.3.1** Vignette 1 | Public affirmation of evaluation by the Senior Executive | In published research, the Senior Executive *claims the link between the presence of evaluation and the ability to demonstrate accountability*  
* cites a story which links the presence of evaluation research with the continuation of project funding  
* links himself with these positive experiences and his “championing of evaluation” | Present  
Prior to this research  
Ongoing |
| **7.3.2** Vignette 2 | The “speaker phone” address | Public oral presentations by the Senior Executive of affirmation of evaluation | Yr 1 |
| **7.3.3** Vignette 3 | The link between theory of action and evaluation | Public oral presentations by the Senior Executive particularly linking the idea of an evaluation technology – a theory of action approach, as the equivalent to demonstrating accountability | Yr 4 |
| **7.4** Vignette 3 | The tuition of senior staff by the Senior Executive: the “lift story” | The story of how the Senior Executive trains senior staff in the capacity to offer rapid verbal accounts of their portfolio expenditures | Ongoing |
| **7.5** Vignette 4 | An account of the personal risks of living in competitive public sector environments | Personal discourse of the Senior Executive used in public presentations indicating his desire to protect staff from a bloody and ruthless environment with all its vagaries | Yr 4 |
| **7.5** Vignette 5 | The recognition that a safe space is needed for learning | The giving of public recognition that such spaces are needed, but the colonizing of this by over-claiming its existence | Yr 4 and ongoing |
| **7.6.1** Vignette 4 | The exercise of conscious control of project reports | The circulation by the Senior Executive of an example of a sort of report he envisaged projects might produce. The circulated example was in fact a Communications Report | Yr 3 |
| **7.6.2** Vignette 5 | The use of embarrassment as a systemic and individual control mechanism | Illumination of idea through use of theory and case material advanced by Hirschhorn (1996). Curtailing documentation of contestation  
Symbolic function of evaluation, and ongoing need to feed the symbol | Ongoing |
7.2 Two faces of accountability

Sinclair’s (1995) research into how CEO’s in public sector agencies think about and experience the idea of accountability, revealed what she called two accountability discourses, which she named a ‘structural discourse’, and a ‘personal discourse’. I explore these two approaches to accountability, as they illuminate aspects of the project evaluation, in particular, the approach taken by the Senior Executive to the idea of accountability, and how he linked accountability very closely to the practice of evaluation.

Sinclair (1995) defines the “structural discourse” as emphasizing

the technical property of a role or contract, structure or system. Territories are clear and demarcated, accountabilities uncontested. The language used in this discourse is abstracted, detached and rational. The structural discourse renders accountability, whether political, managerial, or some other form, as something the CEO works with, and controls toward foreseeable ends. Accountability is unproblematic, able to be delivered, demarcated or exacted, independently of personality, politics or fate (p.224)

This discourse assumes a problem free ambience. In it, accountability is likened to what Siever (1998), writing about advertising, calls a ‘virtue word’. Like other virtue words, such as ‘power’ and ‘honour’, accountability is used to conjure up an important image – the image being that someone, somewhere, is engaged in or at least has the delegated authority, to make an appropriate, proper and wise use of resources. The word’s frequent use suggests that in some ways it serves as undifferentiated hope (Sievers, 2002) that perhaps we all hold at some level, in an increasingly turbulent world – the hope that someone has an eye on the bigger picture. Perhaps too, part of the appeal of accountability as a ‘virtue word’ is that within it lies the hope that if something amiss is discovered, that this ‘wrong’ can be articulated, addressed, perhaps by calling someone to account, perhaps by less public remedies, and we can return to making ongoing progress in our pursuits.

Another aspect of the unproblematic ‘structural discourse’, as found by Sinclair, is its rationality. There are two particular forms of rationality within the Department, one faced by all public sector environments, being ‘New Public Management’, and the other the particular form of rationality relating to ‘productivist’ goals, a term I explain shortly. Firstly I will present the terms and conditions of ‘New Public Management’.
I have already stated, New Public Management (NPM) is a term which is often interchangeable with the term ‘managerialism’. I use the term New Public Management to broadly encompass the influence of private sector management models, with its associated practices of tendering services, and splitting purchasers from providers (Davis and Rhodes, 2000; Boston, 1996). NPM is nested within a worldwide trend in politics known as ‘neo-liberalism’, with its central tenets of economic liberalism, a reduced government role in public sector spending, and increased use of a discourse of personal responsibility and self reliance (Parker and Fopp, 2005).

The purchaser provider split occurred within the Department in the late 1990’s, and on that basis, the Portfolio Manager told me early in my involvement with the MI project, “I invest in outcomes”. As the Portfolio Manager was on the ‘purchasing’ side of the Department, he represented the policy arm of the Department, ‘purchasing’ from the ‘providers’, who, in the MI case, were the project managers and team. Within a context of outputs and outcomes, there were specific ‘deliverables’, which themselves were fashioned on the SMART criteria: “specific, measurable, accountable, realistic, and timebound”, criteria which I was informed of during evaluation training in the Department. New Public Management terminology finds a conducive environment in the mechanism of ‘project management’, and finds synergy with the idea of ‘projectification’. These terms all reflect a worldwide attempt to find ‘new’ models of reform, and were terms embraced with particular vigour by the government in power when the MI project began.

The second aspect of rationality I refer to here is what I have called the ‘productivist’ goals of the Department (Ilberry & Bowler, 1998). To invoke the salience of these goals to this discussion I need to repeat the Department’s goals here, having referred to them briefly in chapter 2. They were to

- To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of [industry] business chains in meeting customer needs
- To work toward increasing [industry] exports as a way of strengthening regional and rural communities
- To establish viable regional economies supported by sustainable internationally competitive industries.

With aims such as these, in the context of accountability, defined in its most basic form as being ‘able to be called to account’ (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2002), it is not surprising that an accountability discourse be couched in terms of what rural geographers call a productivist discourse. Productivism is generally understood to characterise an emphasis on raising business
output through intensification, concentration and specialization (Ilberry & Bowler, 1998). With
the largest portion of Departmental funds coming from the State, the Department’s productivist
goals of necessity mirror those of the wider system of state and national governance. There is no
ambiguity that increased productivity is what the Prime Minister regards himself as having a
mandate to deliver: “The overriding aim of our agenda is to deliver Australia to an annual
[economic] growth rate of over four percent on average during the decade to 2010” (Howard,
1998, as discussed by Eckersley, 2001, p.13).

Within the structural accountability discourse then, one can start to see some of the forces which
were driving the accountability response toward the North of the North-South administrative
axis. The MI project, in the light of the above discussion, was predictably going to be skewed in
its reporting toward both the goals of New Public Management: that outcomes can be controlled
and accounted for, and that those outcomes were going to be infused with the productivist goals
of increasing the objectively understood and quantifiable elements of production. As I have
already noted, the way the GTL assisted in shaping the representation of these outputs is evident
from the outline of the GTL located in Appendix 1.

In contrast to the ‘structural discourse’, Sinclair (1995) found the CEOs also talked of what she
named as a ‘personal discourse’, which is ambiguous, and both feared and uplifting; it is about
exposure and vulnerability, and “is very close to the CEO’s sense of who she or he is” (p.224).

Accountability then, is both something which is in part shaped by the system in which it is being
enacted (such as a system requiring a particular productivist goal, within a ‘New Public
Management’ milieu) and in part shaped by the subjective responses of the individuals, such as
CEO’s, to the environmental demands as they see them. In this sense, as Sinclair (1995) points
out, being accountable is an “interpretive act”. The Senior Executive helped fashion evaluation
as a major component in a Departmental response to a hostile environment. I will present
evidence which supports an interpretation that for the Senior Executive evaluation represented a
means to manage uncertainty, and a tool for public relations, and as such, represented a systemic
defence mechanism.

7.3 Constructing the link between evaluation and accountability

In this section I outline the accounts given by the Senior Executive which demonstrate how he
constructs the links in the chain from evaluation to departmental accountability. I regard these
accounts as being consistent in the main with Sinclair’s conceptualization of the structural
discourse – that it has a technical property. It is to be delivered in a certain way – typically in abstract, and detached, and rational form. It is worked with and controlled by the CEO, toward foreseeable ends, and is typically presented as unproblematic. While consistent with these ideas, the accounts given begin to blur with the ‘personal discourse’, in those accounts where the Senior Executive aligns his formal responses with the strategy of evaluation, and puts his own ‘personal time’ into the tuition of his senior staff.

Despite this blurring into the ‘personal discourse’, I outline in the section following this one, in section 7.4, detail which is more in keeping with Sinclair’s conceptualization of the personal discourse.

To flesh out the views of the Senior Executive on accountability, I draw on a range of de-identified source material, both from published work, and also from verbal presentations he has made, to audiences both within and outside the Department, including at a public administration conference. In these sources he makes clear the place evaluation plays in his interpretation of accountability, and, in so doing, constructs a system which then acts to mitigate against the hierarchy actually engaging with the program reality, with all its ambiguity, uncertainty and contestation.

Once I have painted a picture of how the Senior Executive sees his accountabilities, and connects them with the practice of evaluation, I can then put forward the idea of evaluation, in this idealized form, acting as a form of ideology, operating as a system of defence. I see the logic of this thinking as follows: evaluation is the thread which will link up the fragmented bits of our projects into credible stories which will keep at bay the forces which threaten us.

Another way of thinking about this threat is captured by Smith and Simmons (1983), who perhaps more pointedly state that “lurking beneath the myth (or corporate legend, or cultural pattern) might be seen the cleavages threatening the organization as a whole that might erupt if the myth wasn’t present” (p.377).
7.3.1 The Senior Executive's published views on accountability

In a published account of the Department’s approach to evaluation, in which the Senior Executive is a joint author, (CS 15) evaluation is portrayed as a key practice in the way accountability is managed within the Department.

Four key premises are clear from the way evaluation is discussed in the article:

- evaluation is something being taken seriously in this Department
- other public sector agencies are also seeking to build their evaluation capacity
- the environment is one of competition for funds
- the environment of increased accountability necessitates answering questions from the general public, in which a narrative of efficiency and purposeful difference in program outcomes is expected

The account goes on to explain the early success of one of the Department’s projects, in which evaluation was seen to play a key role. The reader is informed that a GTL approach was used, together with relevant evidence, to tell a “performance story”. The success of the project constituted a great result for the Department, and for a significant period, so the story was told, funds were forthcoming to this Department.

This story, told in this article, is a very significant story. I have heard both the Senior Executive and the staff of the Evaluation Unit tell the story several times. Judging from the way it is told, and by whom it is told, it is reasonable to draw two conclusions. One conclusion relates to the significance of the monetary reward flowing from the evaluation work. The result is cast as a ‘win’ to the Department, showing its capacity to be accountable for its funding, with the assistance evaluation processes, and is rewarded with further and ongoing funding. The other conclusion is that it was seen as a ‘win’ to the emerging discipline of evaluation. The Evaluation Unit within the Department claims the story, and also perhaps, given its currency at evaluation conferences, the story can be seen as a win for the development of evaluation as a separate professional entity.

The Senior Executive took experiences such as these with him when he moved into his senior position. The historical antecedents for both the more generalised championing of evaluation, and more specifically for the Senior Executive to be named as an “Evaluation Champion”, were in place.
7.3.2 The Senior Executive’s public presentations on accountability and evaluation

In this section I refer to two public presentations I observed which were given by the Senior Executive. One was a presentation he gave to Departmental staff assembled for evaluation training in Year 1. I have entitled this presentation, discussed below, as “The speaker phone address” (vignette 1). The second address, “accountability lies with having a theory of action”, was to an audience at a public sector conference in Year 4. In this address, I draw attention to the Senior Executive’s linking of the idea of accountability, with that of having a “theory of action” (vignette 2). In this same address, the Senior Executive also tells another story, which is referred to as “the lift story” (vignette 3).

Vignette 1: Exploiting mines and handsome payoffs: the speaker phone address

The first and clearest statement I heard in relation to how accountability as a concept was spoken of by senior management within the Department, was during an evaluation training course in which I participated in the early period of my contact with the Department in Year 1 of the MI project. The Senior Executive was unable to attend the opening of the training in person to give his verbal affirmation to those assembled. Instead, we gathered around a speaker phone, and listened to his address.

He advised the assembled group that he wanted them to know that what they were doing (assembling for evaluation training) was regarded by him as very important. Evaluation, he said, was

one of the real mines we have yet to fully exploit. It will pay off handsomely…We can showcase our systems of management as never before. The [Department’s] management systems are seen by others in government as superior. It gives us significant advantage…

Our funding has been trending downwards. Government and other investors don’t understand what we do. When we take the trouble to talk to Government, in terms they can understand, it makes a difference. …We must be able to talk to Government and individual stakeholders about the impact of what we are doing for them. …We need to be able to talk to investors in terms of the value for investments. If we can do that, we will be dramatically ahead of the competition. We are in complicated fields of
endeavour. This is an area of enterprise, which is vitally important for the Department. Funding will follow projects that can demonstrate impact…

Discussion of vignette 1

When I first heard language like this, I didn’t heed it greatly. I thought I could make sense of whatever I did while working on evaluation within a project team, and that how the Department might use the information gleaned through evaluation was both outside my concern, and my authority. I did give a lot of thought to the use to which the producers in the project might put the information we were collecting, concerns which were located in the East-West axis, and my inability to engage with producers as primary project stakeholders was an accountability (or, as I gradually came to understand it better as a responsibility) which became a major source of role conflict for me.

It seems in retrospect that my focus at the practitioner/ program client level, and my belief that I could bracket out and remain undisturbed by the systemic influences, was at best naïve, at worst irresponsible. Since this experience, I have become more mindful of the literature which exists on doing “research for the government” and the published range of different styles and levels of control used by government in efforts to de-politicise and de-contextualise difference and to control of what is considered allowable interpretation and acceptable data (Sinclair, 2001; Stake, 1998). It seems that I needed to discover this literature for myself.

Vignette 2: Evaluation as part of the game

The Senior Executive’s address to a public sector conference (SC 14) contained, as might be expected, some similar material as mentioned above in his speakerphone address. In a 90-minute session at this conference, he emphasised to those present how seriously his Department took accountability.

The Senior Executive’s conference session followed directly on from a paper which had addressed the differences between “bureaucratic evaluation” (which could be recast as evaluation within the North-South axis) and “democratic evaluation” (which would also be seen as an East West axis key concern). The Senior Executive, in following immediately on from this address, started his talk with what I heard as a hint of a semi nervous, or embarrassed laughter, saying he hoped that he was a “bureaucrat, with democratic intent”. He then went on in his address to the audience largely of evaluation practitioners, to say that he was motivated by those who didn’t have democratic intent, and how his Department had been open to attack from others
in Government. He said they “had an organization which didn’t have a good enough answer, which left us open to unfair attack”. He noted these attacks were “hard on staff”. One particular attack he described was when the Department reported to Treasury that the number of [specific tasks] their Department had completed had fallen. The response from Treasury to this information, according to the story as it is told, was to reduce their staff numbers. Since these attacks, “we’ve given ourselves some real tools, and have had some terrific gains…Eight years later…it really does pay to get involved in this game, which you’re obviously committed to”.

The Senior Executive talked of the increase in the requirements for public sector accountability, and showed the chart below (Figure 15) as an overhead:

**Figure 15 Senior Executive’s template of Departmental accountabilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>The Department</th>
<th>External factors</th>
<th>Community Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations for</td>
<td>Strategy:</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>(this column was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community? Goals</td>
<td>theory of</td>
<td>activity; Community activity;</td>
<td>left blank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targets</td>
<td>action (emphasis added)</td>
<td>Weather</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion of Vignette 2**

The above figure is my summary of the key points that were presented, and I believe are an accurate representation of the key points the Senior Executive was making. I read this chart as an outline of accountability processes. The Government sets out the goals and targets for programs; the Department responds by developing a theory of action as to how it will implement these goals and targets; the matters outside the control of the Department are matters such as private sector activity, and the weather. Community outcomes similarly are a good distance from what the Department can assure, or be accountable for.

I draw two conclusions from Figure 15. One is the emphasis on the importance of the “theory of action” to the Department, as a way of conveying the coherence that Boxer (2004) talks of, a necessary narrative in the task of the North-South administration. The other conclusion I draw is that there was a ‘sleight of hand’ by which the Senior Executive separates himself from the idea of accountability for ‘community outcomes’, given the ‘external factors’ over which he has no control. In doing this, I see him as removing a focus from the East-West axis, and placing it back on what he felt the Department could be accountable for. In speaking to his representation set out in Figure 15 above, the Senior Executive said that: “we ought to be accountable for our theory of action. This is where our accountability lies…”
The Senior Executive has created two meanings in his presentation of Figure 15 above. One is that he has created a causal link between the notion of being able to point to evidence of a theory of action, and the concept of accountability. If you’ve got one, you’ve got the other. The theory of action has become symbolised. The second meaning he has created lies in the removal of accountability from a domain over which you have no direct control: he has deemed community outcomes an externality, which in terms of economic theory, is one of the factors that cannot be controlled (Bannock, 1998).

**Vignette 3: “the lift story”: 8 second elevator (lift) training**

In this same presentation to the public sector conference as referred to in Vignette 2 above, the Senior Executive went on to say that his Portfolio Managers spend $10m in their Research and Development budgets each year. He described what he refers to it as his ‘elevator pitch’, but has become known as ‘the lift story’, being his account of how he trains them in being responsive to funders in relation to these budgets.

I have heard members of the Evaluation Unit in the Department proffer this story spontaneously at public seminars, in what seems to me to be a spirit of some approval. This interpretation may not be correct – they may in fact be awkward about the story, but as they are not obliged to spontaneously recount the story, I am more inclined to think it is said with some approval. As with some other accounts such as this given in this thesis, interpretations are left open, as I did not engage in further questioning of these matters at the time, or since.

The (lift) training involves the Senior Executive’s efforts to ensure his senior staff (particularly those in charge of the $10m Research and Development budget) are prepared to make the most of the situation if they encounter a Minister or senior decision maker of influence in their policy and program area. The Senior Executive’s focused efforts entail him assisting his senior executive officers to refine their capacity to give a precise, verbal account of a funded program or project, to someone with power and resources, such as a government minister. The Senior Executive gives this training to his senior managers in the lift of the Department’s corporate offices; the lift journey from the ground floor to the executive level is of eight seconds duration.

The key emphases given in this training focus on two requirements: these senior managers are required to be able to ‘account for’ their work using a ‘theory of action’ approach, and in the prescribed minimum time, the time of the lift journey.

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4 An elevator pitch (or elevator speech) is a widely used term particularly among entrepreneurs seeking venture capital. Wikipedia defines it as a “brief overview of an idea for a product, service, or project. The pitch is so called because it can be delivered in the time span of an elevator ride (say, thirty seconds)".
Discussion of Vignette 3

Two key things stand out for me from the lift story. One is the emphasis on the theory of action approach, the other the critical factor of time. My wider observations on the story question whether this is a story of a protective Senior Executive helping his staff protect or expand their resources? Or is it a story which illuminates the gendered nature of the bureaucracy? Or is it a story of bullying? Or does it represent some of all these possibilities?

Firstly, a ‘theory of action’ approach. A key piece of the ‘lift story’ is that the kernel of how senior staff are tutored by the Senior Executive to ‘account for’ their work is derived from a ‘theory of action’ of their programs. This “theory of action” is regarded as a component of a program theory approach to evaluation; this (program theory) approach is the dominant approach to Evaluation within this Department. In bringing this link into the tuition of senior managers, the story also becomes symbolised as the importance of evaluation.

The second dominating force in the ‘lift story’ is the time factor. The senior officers are to develop their scenarios as if they have eight seconds of time with this Minister so they can answer the question, in minimum time: “tell me what you did with the money”. He tells his audience that as he “has this guy in the corner” (in the lift), the lift journey can be re-enacted until the respondent is able to be adequately succinct in the account he gives of a particular budget expenditure. A direct association is made between the time available, and the speed with which others, such as government ministers or advisors, will make judgments of value. If eight seconds is your allotment to make an impression, there is only one possibility - that it must be a good one.

There are a number of different interpretations which can be made of this story and what it says about the nature of relationships between the Senior Executive and his senior staff. It could be seen that he is being helpful to his staff, showing his protectiveness toward them. He is on their side. He wants them to perform well, look credible, and is willing to put his own time in to assist in their preparation for such an event. In showing his protectiveness toward them, he is also showing his protective response to the turf of the programs under his direction- seeing to it that both staff and the programs are both safe and able to grow.

Inherent in this idea of protecting turf is also the threat of competition from other Departments, which has already become an explicit theme in this discussion on accountability. Linked to this is the idea that public resources are finite, that they are subject to a host of claims on them, and that those resources which are allocated must be seen to be effectively and efficiently used: that
is, accountable. Only on this basis are funds likely to continue to flow, as the Senior Executive has made clear on numerous other occasions. So one image conjured up in this story, is of the Senior Executive as both protective of his key players, and challenging of them to perform in the way that matters most – being seen to be accountable, by way of a good story, a good ‘theory of action’ of a program achievement, in minimum time.

Another response I had to this story had to do with gender. While the notion of the Senior Executive coaching his staff could be seen as somewhat endearing, at the same time it could be seen in a gendered light. The coaching idea had an association for me of the way in which a football team might be coached. Liepins’ (2000) research confirms that the Senior Executive is accurate to say that he has this ‘guy’ (his senior manager) in the corner, as it is mostly males who are in senior positions in the public service in this industry sector.

Another association for me, which is related to coaching, was also bullying. Having “the guy in the corner”, while he is harangued by the Senior Executive, is tantamount to bullying behaviour to my way of thinking. I believe I would experience it as such if I were in that position.

While the above interpretations of what the lift story says about the relationship between the Senior Executive and his senior staff need to be left open, what is unambiguous from the lift story, is the Senior Executive’s explicit views about the need for an organizational capacity to have, and voice, a ‘theory of action’,, and for its senior officers to be able to speak clearly and concisely about this as required. Evaluation was a necessary link in that chain of story telling.

**7.4 Accountability – the personal discourse**

Sinclair (1995) describes as ambiguous the confidential and anecdotal aspects of the personal discourse of accountability. It is often portrayed as something to be feared, although it can also be uplifting. It is “about exposure and vulnerability”. This discourse functions to “admit the risks and failures, exposure and invasiveness with which accountability is experienced” (p.224)

A quote from one of Sinclair’s CEO’s gives the flavour of the personal discourse. This CEO talked of the risks of implementing what are seldom well articulated policy decisions.

The difficulty for [the CEO] is that in reality he has to practice being a quasi-politician but if he takes that too far and indulges in it too much, he runs the risk of getting his
fingers chopped off, or perhaps even his head. But he’s got to do it (Sinclair, 1995, p.224).

Another CEO talked of the exponential growth of accountability mechanisms and how these can feel like a “blow torch to the belly...and very personally and openly...” (Sinclair, 1995, p.226). Another talked of need for good supportive staff, “so that you can stand up to the onslaught, ……so that you don’t get ripped apart” (Sinclair, 1995, p.226). One CEO made no bones about the risks that if things go wrong, this can be seen as “a sort of death knell to their career basically” (Sinclair, 1995, p.227). For another, there was an emphasis on the capacity to stay ahead of danger: “you have to be one step ahead of the bushfire before it breaks out. Sometimes we’re not that clever, and sometimes we’ve got a raging fire before you know it” (Sinclair, 1995, p.227). Other metaphors used to describe the personal discourse were being a ‘sacrificial lamb’, or being ‘the meat in the sandwich’. The possibility of being ‘overtaken’ is clear in the following quote: “We have to understand there is a time when you run out of places to hide”. For those who are seen to fail, “the penalties lie in shabby ignominy……it’s not hard to think of people who’ve been shuffled sideways into oblivion” (Sinclair, 1995, p.231).

My contact with the Senior Executive was when he was acting in his formal role, and hence, unlike a one-to-one interview, the method used by Sinclair (1995) to collect her data, my data on the Senior Executive’s more personal account were limited. However, his personal account could be partially glimpsed from some of his public addresses, and also from his more “off the cuff” responses to questions from his audience.

In his public sector conference address referred to above, he talked of “deep scars” from the time when the Department lost staff following performance reviews that left them exposed. He said you can “get mauled in the process”. Unless you’re careful, he commented, you “can be hit by the Southern Aurora” (the Southern Aurora is an interstate train).

The amalgam of images of life in the highly paid, and highly dangerous climate are pretty bloody – fingers and heads being cut off, bodies torn apart, being hit by fast moving trains, or more mildly, but differently painful in its attenuation, being “shuffled sideways into oblivion” (Sinclair, 1995, p.231).
7.5 Colonising the safe space

The Senior Executive and the leader of the Evaluation Unit do not ignore the system psychodynamics. Like the accountability discourse, the system psychodynamics are named, and then, I would argue, colonized.

In his conference address referred to in the above vignettes, the Senior Executive sought to reassure those present during his presentation about evaluation, that they should not think the Department hasn’t addressed the obvious issue of anxiety. He said that they have created a ‘safe space’ ‘where the truth comes out’. The leader of the Evaluation Unit, whose conference presentation followed on from that of the Senior Executive, sought to make similar reassurances. He emphasized to listeners “if you get a bad result, you’re not out the door”. He added: “we have conquered the fear factor”. At other public gatherings I have heard both the Senior Executive and the leader of the Evaluation Unit use the phrase ‘intelligent failure’ - they refer to making room, ‘in this safe space’ for ‘intelligent failure’.

I have seen where agencies picking up the Department’s rhetoric about the safe space, retell it to their own staff. In promoting this Department’s use of evaluation to its own staff, a health agency conveys in a powerpoint presentation, that the Department has “instilled a culture of learning evaluation, to help manage the fear” (SC 20). This claim seems to be taken at face value.

In the time I was with the Department and since, I have never seen published nor spoken about either publicly or privately, such a case of “intelligent failure”, suggesting that this idea is present more in rhetoric than reality. I see this sort of rhetoric now as a form of colonization of virtue words and approaches. There is no invitation to question the virtue words, such as ‘safe space’, and ‘intelligent failure’. Perhaps, as Sievers (2002) has noted in his writings about trust, that the overuse of the word ‘trust’ can be thought about as a yearning, a thought which if applied to the case of the Department, could be seen as a yearning to find a ‘safe space’, where ‘intelligent failure’ can not only be tolerated but learnt from, where heads, or fingers, will not be chopped off, where staff budgets will not be slashed for spurious reasons, or where people will not be shuffled off in ignominy.

The idea of a ‘safe space’ to tolerate intelligent failure is never put to the test, as the controlling of the negative or ambiguous detail is managed much further down the hierarchy. It is as if the process of controlling such negative or ambiguous detail itself undergoes a type of splitting – where the management of the ambiguous, the conflictual, the uncertain, is controlled closer to
the action, before the spot fires become the bushfire one of Sinclair’s CEO’s spoke of. The Senior Executive says he brags about the evaluation components of the Departmental programs. Those at the most senior level can comfortably ‘brag’, without fear of exposure, as these senior officers are quite removed from the site at which the rhetoric might be understood as lacking depth.

Despite the Departmental rhetoric about welcoming “intelligent failure”, from my experience, the experience of others, the public sector management literature, including Sinclair’s research on CEO’s, and the reports of those accounts offered by House, (1974), McTaggart (1991), and Yates (2001), failure is not something in which the government can publicly countenance being involved failure. In House’s words, not only cannot failure be countenanced, the account given of a program must be “without blemish” (House, 1974).

7.6 Uncertainty and Control

In chapter 5, I referred to the work of Chattopadhyay and Malhotra (1991) who talk of the need for control as a “phantasy need”, as a control that cannot in fact be achieved.

In this section I would like to bring forward two further examples from the MI project, speak to ways senior managers must manage their areas of accountability. The examples demonstrate the strength of the desire to control, and how this can be brought about both consciously, using familiar methods such as domination, and unconsciously, through the defensive reactions set up when embarrassment is experienced.

In the first example, I provide an account of the conscious use of control. The second example is drawn from the case material and is presented using ideas offered by Hirschhorn (1996) on how subordinates seek to protect their leaders from embarrassment by not putting forward to them matters of embarrassment, such as would be posed by pointing to issues of internal conflict. One by-product of this tendency to not bring to leaders matters which may embarrass them, is that leaders can remain safely oblivious to certain realities. In this sense they can maintain control by not having to confront difficulty about which they can truthfully say they are unaware.

7.6.1 Conscious control

I begin with an example of the Senior Executive’s explicit use of control, which I regard as an action that suggests a deeper anxiety arising from the knowledge that control cannot in fact be
achieved; a state of mind against which defences are needed. The Senior Executive valued the
contribution of evaluation to his management tasks. It helped him secure resources for the
Department. Publicly valuing what evaluation can bring is one thing. The Senior Executive also
gave a concrete example of the sort of evaluation product he had in mind. The next vignette
shows how he conveyed to senior managers his ideas on a desirable format for public
presentation of Departmental project reports, which program leaders might choose to emulate.
He did this by circulating a report which he regarded as an examplar.

Vignette 4: A model to follow - conscious control

In the early part of Year 3, I was advised, in an email from one of the members of the MI Project
Evaluation Working Group, that the Senior Executive had given the MI Program leader a copy
of an evaluation report which had been produced on another Departmental project. The email
read, in part:

This morning [the Program Leader] gave me a copy of the [Program x] Evaluation report
sent by [the Senior Executive] to have a look at. He [the Program Leader] was impressed
with the report and said that if MI could provide a report to the same standard, he would
be happy (as I’m sure the Senior Executive would be, given that he circulated it).
[The actual report circulated as the exemplar is cited as CS 2].

What was being circulated as a model to follow, was not an evaluation report, but was in fact a
communication report, being a type of report used for promotion of Departmental programs. The
leader of the Evaluation Unit later confirmed that it was a communication report.

The day I received the email drawing my attention to the “model” to follow, the Project Manager
and I met with a graphic designer who was going to work with us to produce the Final Report on
the MI project. In our instructions to the graphic designer, we matched the key parameters of the
circulated report, including number of pages and ratio of text to images.

Discussion of Vignette 4

The Senior Executive had set the parameters for the project report. After the Program Leader
circulated the exemplar, an understanding was reached with little dialogue, on what the
expectations for the final report would be. I was a party to this. However, while the Senior
Executive’s preferred style and finish for a final report was in one sense a powerful intervention,
in another sense it was only another small step in the confirmation of the sort of image which
was being encouraged. By at least part way into Year 3, (possibly well prior at a less explicitly
conscious level) I had acquiesced to the dominant presumption, which was that the Final Report would be a fabricated product (Ball, 2003). The project was presented as an unqualified success, the difficulties associated with the Supply Structure company work had been excised, and the mixed responses from producers removed, or in the case of the differing program logics associated with the producers who were clients of the Department, and the producers who were clients of their own cooperative, data left unanalyzed.

By then, my struggles as an evaluator were over. While I was an employee in the last few months of the MI project, prior to becoming so, while still formally a research student, with some departmental duties as evaluation coordinator, I was already experiencing a passive, detached and harmful state of mind. In the light of this ‘acceptance’, or ‘resignation’ to a false self, I was relieved to have a model report to work from, such as the example circulated by the Senior Executive, in terms of what was seen as a desirable format for the Final Report. It had been clear to me for some time that the Final Report was going to be more like the Communications Report which had been circulated.

In the above example of the Senior Executive informing Departmental leaders of the sort of end product of the project story he had in mind, he consciously maneuvers to take control of the response of individuals and the image of the final communication about the project. Presenting the evaluation findings as an evaluation report which gave more attention to the project and policy tensions, including the difficult work of the Supply Structure company effort, was not possible. In fact it was directly forbidden.

### 7.6.2 Unconscious control: the function of embarrassment

Another less overt property experienced in projects, which also has the effect of controlling what is displayed or represented about a particular project, is a defence mechanism that related to myself, and through a vignette I will also relate it to one of the program leaders, and that is the mechanism of embarrassment. I will show below, using the work of Hirschhorn (1996) how embarrassment and self censorship contributed to the suppression of uncomfortable aspects of a project experience. While I have focused in this chapter on the Senior Executive and pointed to some of the conscious ways in which his views were influential, it cannot be said that he directly influenced the MI project leaders. Due to the way embarrassment as a defence mechanism can operate, he didn’t have to directly influence the Program Leaders. They managed the suppression of contested issues closer to the project level.
Vignette 5: We can’t embarrass the government

At one point during the drafting of the Final Project Report, I tried to insert into the draft some cautiously expressed issues about the struggles within the project. I was told by the Program Leader, “Helen, we can’t embarrass the Government”. Following Hirschhorn (1996) I would like to suggest that ‘not embarrassing the government’ might also be thought about as not embarrassing ourselves.

Vignette 5 – Discussion

Icon formation

In Chapter 3 I referred to the Kleinian idea of the state of mind of the ‘depressive position’ (in Winnicott’s terms, the state of “concern”), the state of mind which holds the capacity for embracing the whole, and not splitting off those aspects of the whole which are difficult to hold. The aspects of the depressive position I wish to elaborate on here are the capacity for symbol formation, and the ability to engage in reality testing. I argue that in the process of responding to pressures from the external environment, graphic bloody imagery emerges such as Sinclair (1995) has recounted. It is intuitively understandable that a leader would seek some protection from the threat of those images. In this case study, I argue that the presence of evaluation came to serve as some form of protection. I further argue, using Hirschhorn (1996) that this form of protection becomes symbolized as an icon which then forms a barrier to reality testing.

Hirschhorn adds a dimension to this idea of the iconic protection some symbols provide, by offering an explanation of how shame can play a role in the maintenance of these defenses. The route he takes to explain how shame works between executives and leaders is a complex argument, but one worth pursuing for its salience and capacity to illuminate this case study.

Shame

I am using the word shame in its ordinary meaning, a “feeling of humiliation or distress arising from the consciousness of something dishonourable or ridiculous in one’s own…behaviour or circumstances“ (SOED, 2002).

Briefly, to provide the necessary theoretical background, I need to revisit the idea of symbol formation. When a child develops the capacity for symbol formation, she can ‘play’ with concepts which are not represented materially. Gradually, her ability to apprehend reality is enhanced as she discovers that relationships and patterns need not be linked to concrete objects. Inherent in this idea of play is the ability to hold a contradiction – the play object is not reality, yet the child must also at some level treat the play object as reality in order to be able to play.
Hirschhorn says, “when people fail to sustain this contradiction, they misappropriate the symbol” (Hirschhorn, 1996, p.2). One of Klein’s major contributions was to show us how anxiety can lead us to misappropriate symbols. Hirschhorn explains that one way we respond to anxiety is to ‘hardwire’ a symbol to a reality it symbolises, thus *becoming* the reality, and in so doing, we lose the capacity of thought which symbolic formation allows us (Hirschhorn, 1996, p.2). Hirschhorn gives an everyday example of how we use these ideas on a regular basis.

Walking to your car, you see a man apparently struggling to find a key on his key ring that will open the door to a house. You will, without awareness, interpret the situation: the man has lost the key, or unbeknownst to him, the lock has been changed, or he is anxious about entering the house and so on. Each of these interpretations transforms the objects of the scene – the man, the door – into symbols of a situation. They signify something that we do not see, but imagine or infer from the context. They are in anthropological terms “markers of a context”, which we impose on the scene. The context helps us to link the parts of the scene together in particular ways. These linkages in turn help us anticipate or predict what will happen next: the man will ring the doorbell, he will abandon his efforts, he will simply wait at the door.

If particular contexts have a great deal of affective meaning for you – eg, you are fixed on the idea of ‘rejection’, you may conclude, prematurely, that unbeknownst to the man the lock has been changed, which signifies that he is being rejected. You may well be so decided in your interpretation, that you are unable to apprehend other clues, eg, though the man is fumbling, his face appears relaxed. Indeed, you will not only not notice these clues; they simply will not exist for you. The issue of rejection and the anxiety it stimulates, has hardwired your symbolic rendering of the situation to the actual situation. You can only see what you are feeling, and so fail to notice other clues that do not corroborate your feeling state. (Hirschhorn, 1996, p.3)

Hirschhorn argues that misappropriation of symbols happens frequently in the management process. I argue that when the Senior Executive turned evaluation into an ‘icon’, an ‘idealized organizational function’, he fused the symbol with the reality. After this, evaluation stood for success. The demands of Treasury and other funders were not going to abate. The threat became omnipresent. The Senior Executive’s heroic role of saving the Department and its programs, which he was seen to do early in his time as Senior Executive, was a crusade that was only going to get more intense, thereby ensuring the ongoing fusion of the concept and the reality. By the time I started with the MI project, the Department was well down the path of evaluation
becoming “the tail that wagged the project”, a fear voiced to me by one senior manager within the Department. Hirschhorn argues that once we have replaced reality with the symbol, if we can manipulate or control the symbol, we believe in phantasy that we can control the reality. The Senior Executive did just this – he took the ‘controversial step’, as he called it, of making evaluation mandatory for all projects. This decision was then followed by a requirement for the Evaluation Unit to deliver evaluation techniques and frameworks, which themselves then also in effect became mandatory, to the extent that they were the “supported approach” to evaluation.

But how were these icons, or ‘preexisting mind states’ of relevance to what happened in the MI case? This in part has already been suggested, by way of the application of the ‘rule’ of ‘mandatory evaluation’. Hirschhorn’s argument takes us one step further in understanding these complex dynamics. He links for us the item which has become so embued as to be symbolically important, and explains how this symbolic importance reduces our capacity to think.

Hirschhorn links the idea of anxiety in the case of threatened failure, with a dynamic which links the anxiety with a signal that failure has occurred. The threat is now not just what might occur, a test for maintenance of contradictions while in the midst of a threat, but that it is as if the event has transpired. The anxiety in response to this acts as a punishment for the failure. Hirschhorn is very aware that this idea requires some more clarification. He says that at this point in the explication of his argument about how concepts become fused with beliefs about reality, we need to think of the group context within the organization.

Hirschhorn suggests we can gain further insight in organizational defences against “facing facts” (Boxer, 2004) by examining the dynamics of shame. He says that when we feel shame, this can evoke feelings of self-disgust, feelings, which like anxiety, are intolerable and require us to transform them. We might construct some punishing fantasies, but not so punishing as to effect our whole being, perhaps only part of it. An example might be that we conclude that a meeting didn’t go well because we could have been better prepared. This is not a self-perception that is so damaging that it cannot be remedied. We can feel a bit guilty about this, and this replaces the shame we may have felt. But if the shame is too big, we need to protect “the whole of who we are”, and we may transform the feeling of being defective, to a feeling that the fault lay with the hopeless way in which the meeting was chaired – that accounted for our poor presentation.

This translates in hierarchical organizations, to a leader who may, when faced with embarrassment, project this onto others, particularly subordinates.
This gives rise to a new social process, as subordinates and others work to protect the executive from embarrassment. This is why people in organizations develop practices for stage-managing the executive’s appearances. Its function is not primarily to suppress dissent, but rather to minimize the likelihood that the executive will feel embarrassed (Hirschhorn, 1996, p.6).

Hirschhorn argues that subordinates do protect the executive from embarrassment, and this is because part of their self-esteem is represented by the executive’s self esteem. If they idealise his stature to idealize themselves, if he feels embarrassed, so too do they feel embarrassed. “Group members have in common particular impulses and feelings because they share in the common set of idealizations represented by the leader. This is why the latter’s embarrassment becomes their own” (Hirschhorn, 1996, p.6). If they limit the embarrassment of the leader, followers can limit their own sense of shame. So when the Program Leader suggested to me when I proposed some words for the Final Project Report which pointed to some of the difficulties which had been experienced in the project, that we “can’t embarrass the government”, while on one account he may well have been speaking of an amorphous ‘body’ out at some distance from himself, following Hirschhorn’s argument, it is reasonable to conclude that he was also possibly talking about himself. He asked me not to put ‘red lights’ around some of the more controversial aspects of the project. In doing so, he was also asking for foreclosure on the prospect of opening up the painful issues with which the project had to deal, and in so doing, protecting both the Senior Executive and himself from the discomfort, and fear, both legitimate, and imagined, inherent in the process. Hirschhorn emphasises that the feeling of shame is often out of all proportion to the magnitude of the error or failure, and can only be understood due to the universality of the experience of shame.

In terms of an individual’s identification with an organization, if an organization’s idealization of its identity is threatened, such as the possibility of a poor program outcome, then this threat will stimulate feelings of shame. In identifying with the salience of the threat, the feeling of shame amplifies the threat, feelings which are calmed by the reification of an icon. The icon in my case study is the evaluation process. In this example, what it represented which could be seen as a way of thinking about evaluation, became the concrete representation of the reified phenomenon. Part of the dynamic which is then set up in these circumstances, is that more energy has to be put into maintaining the symbol, with increased emphasis on communication and marketing. Inherent in these processes, are kernels of the passivity and inauthenticity for those involved, which accompany these games.
7.7 Discussion and Summary

In fields of endeavour that defy a rational explanation, such as the dynamics in the MI case study, systems psychodynamics can be particularly illuminating. Discussions of feelings of shame are conspicuous by their absence in both everyday work in organizations, and to a large degree, in non psychodynamic organization theory. Hirschhorn (1996) says that the phenomena of shame and its management have been so suppressed, that “we no longer observe shame but rather the consequences of its suppression” (p.8). Hirschhorn makes reference to the ‘mantra’ about learning from failure, which typically is delivered with no consideration given to the psychodynamics as well as the social dynamics that shape how the blame and failure are both experienced and distributed. He suggests that repetition of a mantra like ‘learning from failure’, can play the role of negation, the role of driving further underground the learning we are aiming to bolster. The more we talk about ‘intelligent failure’, as this Department does, the less we are able to acknowledge the emotional consequences of trying to learn from failure. This further fragments our experience, and pushes it further away from our understanding.

The above analysis gives some insight into some of the dynamics operating in the case study, and deepens our understanding of the centrality of these issues, and their role in increasing our sense of vulnerability. This chapter has built on the work of chapter 5 in which I described a project context in which it was difficult to hold together a picture of an emergent project, with strengths and difficulties, but in which the parties ultimately became divided from each other, causing damaged relationships, harm to the project tasks, and offering a distorted picture of itself to the outside world. Chapter 6 examined how the evaluation framework and the technologies used in the evaluation pursuit, such as the GTL, became shaped more by the dominant organizational requirements than being able to keep open a space at the project level in which the project complexity and conflict could be appreciated.

In chapter 7 I looked more closely at the organizational context in which the MI project took place. Largely through an analysis of the discourse used by the Senior Executive in relation to two tightly intertwined ideas – evaluation and accountability – I offer an account which goes some of the way to explaining how the North-South administrative axis as set out in the Compass model in chapter 1, is, and remains, the dominant axis. This account suggests how, by default, the East-West axis, the clients in their particularity, “drop out of sight” (Smith, 1988, p.157) or as Fletcher (1998) might say “get disappeared.”
I examined the dominance of the North-South axis through the rhetoric of accountability, as expressed by the Senior Executive, while also suggesting the operation of this rhetoric as a social defence against anxiety, a defence in which evaluation plays a role in constructing. In the words of Morley & Ife (2002) “instead of rationality being a tool to help find meaning it has come to represent meaning itself” (p.71), another way of referring to the symbol fusion described by Hirschhorn (1996).

While setting out the more usual language in which accountability is discussed, language Sinclair (1995) calls the ‘structural discourse,’ (the language of efficiency, of meeting targets, being able to say “what happened with the money”), I have also made reference to what Sinclair calls a ‘personal discourse.’ While I had only limited data on this from my observation of the Senior Executive, I was able to show some of the elements of this discourse, which were located more in the experience of ‘being accountable’ and the risks and threats that this entails. Experienced here include the possibility of the CEO, or the staff, getting “mauled,” or hit by fast moving trains. Part of the task for the CEO is to keep threat at bay, protect the Department and the staff, and give little or nothing to any potential opponents, which in this context, would include competitors for public and private sector program funding.

The Senior Executive builds a very clear and strong picture about how evaluation plays an important role at this strategic level. While recognizing that as a Department they have gone a little further than most by making evaluation mandatory, they claim that they have also created a “safe space”, and have “conquered the fear factor.” This fiction that the Senior Executive has allowed himself to create operates at the level of an “unconscious fantasy of control” (Hirschhorn, 1998, p.43). In setting up these fantasies, I argue that he has been assisted by the leader of the Evaluation Unit, operating in a collusion which is “out of awareness” (Kets de Vries, 1999). The roots of these defensive positions include the avoidance of the feelings of dependence on others (Klein, 1988). The vulnerability and pain evoked by these dependencies are clouded in this fantasy of control. I argue that in making the exaggerated claims it does, the Department pushes further away the likelihood of encouraging more rounded, more “realistic” discussion about the very difficult and contested space they occupy in rural and regional Australia.

In chapter 7 I presented two examples of control – one an example of a more conscious, explicit strategy of the Senior Executive promoting the sort of end product he has in mind in relation to project reporting, and the other, a more unconscious dynamic of how feelings of shame and
embarrassment can operate to further shield the Senior Executive from the contested reality of the programs for which he is accountable.

These vignettes from the project are presented to illustrate the picture of the complex operation both of defences at the individual level, and at the systemic level. These pressures toward the formation of a social defence at the organizational level come from all directions toward the Senior Executive. They come from below, through the understandable limitations of individuals acting in uncertain and anxiety provoking situations, myself very much included. These pressures also come from the “sides” and “above” at the wider system, with the requirement for public sector organizations to project particular images of themselves in ways which, when those accounts have to be produced from below, incrementally compromise all parties in the production process.

However, the operation of these defensive processes comes at a great cost. If threat is calmed, soothed and contained, without an attempt at then exploring some of the contested realities, individuals and organizations become less dynamic, more compromised, less open, and more defensive. The system itself then creates further barriers to authenticity. As Long (2001) has pointed out, these tensions operate throughout the organization, at its apex. I found it difficult to question the notion of accountability, it was difficult to face the amount of distortion which was experienced in and became symbolized in the accounting of my work within the organizational systems, and it was exceedingly uncomfortable, in fact a shocking realization, that evaluation may play a key role in that distortion. While these are distancing alienating experiences, another reality is also operating, which is that we are essentially interdependent with each other, and that our social bonds are the source of our work together. These bonds are so critical that Scheff (1997) likens our social bonds to social oxygen. Yet in performative organizational climates, these bonds are hard to maintain, in the absence of, or due to the paucity of, minimal structures in work environments which allow the emergence of our capacities to generate meaning together.

In chapter 8, I examine some ways in which “responsibility” is a more dynamic concept than “accountability”. There are avenues through a consideration of responsibility, to reinvigorate those who have become passive, and marginalized, or feel a loss of authenticity as actors amidst these distorting processes, and in the context of the fabricated accounts which have become the modus operandi of many of our public sector organizations. Without such reinvigoration, our public sector agencies risk a further diminishment of their responsiveness to civil society and disaggregation of ethical responsibility. As Abma (2000) points out, such relational learning
experiences require people are willing to share their experiences, to take each other seriously, and to acknowledge multiplicity.
Chapter 8 The meaning for evaluation practice

8.1 Introduction

In the thesis I have attempted to present the circumstances of the evaluation in its wholeness, within the policy, program and community levels, and to do this over time.

The evaluation process unfolded within the culture of the department and shifts in policy and program events. It was only with hindsight that I could glean the impact of these policy and program events, on the program staff, program participants, and myself.

The events portrayed in the vignettes were significant points in the life of the evaluation, and it has only been through the process of intensive reflection and further research that their full impact has been eventually rendered understandable.

The reader is asked to follow these events, and become aware of their implications for evaluation. I presented theory which speaks to the data and in particular, the psychodynamics of the project and evaluation experience.

The intrapsychic features of this experience was not a level I had anticipated exploring at the outset of the evaluation. However the effect of these events on the individual in organizational environments of dramatic uncertainty and change and the ways in which this uncertainty and anxiety provoking circumstances unfolded, suggested patterns of behaviour which, I argue, can be understood best by considering the ways that human beings manage anxiety and defend against uncertainty and failure.

Following this introduction, I set out in summary form in 8.2 the key reasons offered as to the nature of the harms that were caused. I restate first an overview of the nature of performative organizational climates, and refer to the close interaction that occurs between the individual level, with our inherent valency as humans to mobilise defences as individuals, and the systemic level within organizations to manage the anxieties in the work. Evaluation in this case study became part of these defensive behaviours, and in this way, contributed to the maintenance of a diminished sense of reality, and with this a
diminished sense of personal responsibility, a corrosive state of mind, harmful to work relationships, and hence, work tasks.

Section 8.3 of this chapter, asks the question: what do these findings of the harms which evaluation contributed to this project, mean for evaluation practice? If the dynamics in the setting in which this case study is located are found in other public sector organizational settings, what are the challenges which evaluation faces in these settings?

8.2 Summary of the harms of the performative climate

8.2.1 Overview of the performative climate

In the previous chapters, I have illustrated some of the characteristics of performative organizational climates, including at times an excessively heavy emphasis on clear goals, specific project milestones and quantifiable deliverables. The rhetoric of the importance of accountability seems at times mindlessly delivered, and there is strong claim on the link between the presence of accountability and the practice of evaluation. Through the analysis of case vignettes I show that there are human consequences of these modes of working when they are engaged in in an unbalanced and unthoughtful way, and that these effects are largely unwelcome and are not attended to. I show that there is a fragmentation which accompanies these work forms, and a hollowness surrounding some of their claims. I have shown how projectification as a work modality fits well with the presumption of control through accountability.

I have set out the attractiveness of the rational technologies of evaluation for their contribution to the expectation, indeed the requirement, for clearly articulated stories of successful program performance. One particular model of program logic, the GTL, was used extensively in the Department, to exemplify the match between the corporate needs for communication documentation, and the stepped logic and framework of the chosen logic model. Part of the dynamic of the expectations of an output oriented environment, is the emphasis on economic survival, as if this exists in isolation from the social relations in which it is embedded. As a consequence, the social inter relational aspects of program life are “disappeared” (Fletcher, 1998). These rational gaze of this sort of environment sees the technical view of change, but does not see the social effects. All these pressures
exacerbate the valency we all have as human beings to avoid anxiety by attempting to reduce uncertainty and in so doing trying to maintain control. In the organizational environment, uncertainty and anxiety abound, albeit unacknowledged. Defences are created in the form of rules, structures and norms which serve as systemic social protection against anxiety. Evaluation runs the risk of being one such defence, manipulated as a vehicle to ward off threat, and manage the very human feelings of stress, anxiety and fear.

In the thesis I argue that when evaluation becomes caught in performative climates in this way, there are three key interrelated harmful consequences. These are the production of a distorted view of program reality, harm to individuals and relationships, and consequential negative impact on the work itself and the aims of the project.

8.2.2 Distorted view of program reality

In some work environments, the difficulty in reconciling the reality at the project level with the account actually given of the work might have been dealt with by avoiding the need to confront this directly. But in claiming adherence to accountability requirements, and using the presence of evaluation as evidence of this adherence, an account had to be given or, in duGay’s (1997) phrase, “made up”. The extent of the actual difficulty in tolerating the whole, had to be matched with an opposing parallel process - the need to demonstrate a coherent whole. I have talked about these processes in the thesis as ones of fabrication (Ball, 2003). The fabrication acted as a defence against the real difficulty experienced in delivering public sector programs in an increasingly conflictual environment, and is often offered as an example of accountability, when it is fact a “façade of calculation between the organization and its environment” (Ball, 2003).

Any reader of an account will only gain a one sided view, a concern in its own right, given the responsibility of public sector work to reflect as true an account of its endeavours as is possible, including a diversity of views (Uhr, 1999; Gregory, 1995; Boston, 1996). In designing programs we should access as much knowledge as we can from prior attempts to address the issue at hand. This is precluded when a fabrication is produced.
8.2.3 The cause of harm to individuals and relationships

The evaluator’s account

The second related issue arising from the requirement to narrow the portrayal of a project reality is that it contributes to harming relationships at two levels: at the individual level and at the level of relationships between people. With regard to the individual (intrapsychic) level, I have largely drawn on my own experience at the project level. While I was not alone in my experience, I have avoided offering data from others at the individual level, given the sensitivity of issues such as intrapsychic impacts. I experienced the impact of the overt and covert conflict, the confusion and stress arising from the demands of my own beliefs about my responsibilities and allegiances, making then a gradual move toward the production of a ‘false self’. This inauthentic state of mind and the associated behaviours which go with this, are harmful to individuals. Sloan (1996) describes the impact of systemic defensive manoeuvres, for individuals in a system operating this way, as being subjected to a “form of life that is irrational, dehumanising and unjust” (Sloan, 1996, citing Earnest, 1992).

In relation to the intersubjective, interrelational harm, I provide data throughout the thesis of the stress experienced at the staff group level of working under conditions of ‘performativity’. The theoretical underpinning of the extreme splitting and blaming behaviours of the Project Manager allow me to think about these as triggered by the organizational and rural contexts in which the project took place. In the absence of a suitable organizational structure in which these feelings could be acknowledged, expressed and discussed, defences against these feelings were triggered, and these set up interactions between the parties which were ultimately divisive and harmful. Behavioural defences established against these environments in effect create their own set of dynamics which impinge on work. For example, in order to avoid the fear of failure, a defence against the anxiety of perceived threats from others may be adopted and actions are taken to ward off fear. The actions of others, for example, can be continually discounted in this mind state. This can manifest as a type of contempt. The fact that the behavior may have its origins in unconscious defensive reactions does not minimize its impact on those effected. Interpersonal relationships in work teams are affected, barriers are created, and people distance themselves from such insulting, discounting behaviour.
The stressors in the project could be observed at several levels, and impacted on all parties, the staff and management, the producers, and the Evaluation Working Group. My argument here is that the performative organizational climate added significantly to and inflamed these pressures. I believe I can make this statement with firmness, as this occurred to me in my role, and in some ways I was the least connected to the performative Departmental dynamics, as this organizational context was not my usual place of work. As the evaluation coordinator, I was not immune to the performance pressures – to the contrary, I was affected by them, and within my first week of being involved, I found myself performing by presenting the draft Evaluation Plan to the MI Advisory Committee before I had had time to even discuss the plan with the staff.

**Individual to societal level**

There are implications at the wider societal level if public sector organizations engage increasingly in a portrayal of themselves in so simplified a manner that the problems they address and their solution seem without challenge and routinely achieved. This concern relates to the wider question of ‘truth in government’. It would be a matter of some debate as to how as Australians we are currently ‘measuring up’ in relation to our ‘trust in government’. This is a complex issue, and will be experienced differently by various individuals according to a range of factors such as age, class, ethnicity, gender, and according to the nature of relationship with government in different sectors, such as health, education, or agricultural services. Mackay (2005) suggests that there is a parallel to be drawn between the high use of public relations departments in government departments, and the concomitant degree of social disengagement which he described as reaching critical proportions in Australia. The implications of social disengagement are serious, and are at the heart of the concerns of those evaluation practitioners who see the potential of evaluation practice to contribute positively to social democracy (Hanberger, 2001c). We need to make more explicit the link between our own sense of responsibility and the organizational forms which allow us to perform our roles which our senses of identity and responsibility bring forward. The collective capacities of the producers in the Supply Structure group were not discussed as a form of energy and direction. The performative discourse, or technology of thought, as Parton (1998) calls ideology, structures out those mutual values. These senses of responsibility can be brought forward.
in collaborative empowering environments, not ones characterized by coercion. In saying
that, I recognize the power of the ideology of individualism, characterized by the
neoliberal framework, and the subtle impact this has on discouraging the mutual and
collective interests we have as a society.

8.2.4 Impact on the overall tasks of the project

Logically, harm caused at the individual and interrelational level impacts on the work
tasks, most particularly where the technology of the key tasks of a project are driven
through the relational work of people in interaction – either in one to one interaction, or
group interaction. While resources and energy are required to be expended on meeting the
performative needs of the organization, attention, energy and good will are drawn away
from the overall aim of a project, in terms of assisting a particular target group meet
certain needs.

I summarise these concerns in Figure 16 below, setting them out as harms to those
delivering a service, and those receiving the service. This does not imply a linear
transition “from” the professional “to” the service users, as the relationships are far from
linear, but will suffice at this point for emphasis.
8.3 Evaluation practice as a contributor to harms

This case study has provided the opportunity to revisit and reappraise the factors that led to a harmful association between evaluation processes and organizational practices. Further exploration within a diverse literature confirms some disturbing trends in public administration in which evaluation is implicated that are worthy of deeper and more
extensive research. Below I outline two such trends: firstly a questioning of accountability claims and with this the recognition of the harms of performative climates, and secondly, the increased use of coercion to fulfill evaluation requirements.

### 8.3.1 Uncritical approach to accountability as a contributor to harm

Public demands for government accountability has been one of the main reasons for the growth of evaluation (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). Yet experienced evaluation practitioners are pointing to the serious flaws in the ‘accountability’ rhetoric (Perrin, 2003). Patton (1997) differentiates “evaluation for accountability” and “evaluation for learning”, and points indirectly to mechanistic production of quantitative data to meet targets which are often only used as a ‘front’ for performance, but sets this sort of ‘use’ aside from the evaluation work which he proposes. He leaves it to others to problematize this mechanistic sort of evaluation work.

Zuboff (1988) has referred to antagonism from the workforce resulting from New Public Management, or managerialism. An accountability oriented evaluation presence is seen as being an element of these practices (Pollitt, 1995; Dahler-Larsen, 2002).

There is also a growing literature which takes the tendency toward perverse outcomes one step further than I have in this thesis to date – literature which brings to our attention the next step in this gradient toward perversity, which Ball (2003) captures clearly. He says that it’s not that performativity gets in the way of ‘real academic work’ and learning. It’s that it becomes a vehicle for changing what academic work and learning are. I have referred to B’s (SC1) claim that the evaluation component of the project she studied shaped this project in certain detrimental ways. I make similar claims, based on the interactive effects of evaluation and performativity.

Elliot’s (2001) description of the performative climate in education affirms these concerns, and speaks to the change these ‘accountability mechanisms’ are bringing to the daily professional lives of teachers, and to the change in what it is they are delivering as ‘education’ in the classrooms. Fielding (2001) has documented some of the harms arising from the use of the OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) inspectors in classrooms and schools in the UK and the change being wrought in the daily experiences of teachers.
and children. Case et al (2000) found that the impact on teachers of the inspection process, including feeling professionally compromised, intimidated and stressed. There are similar warnings coming from the health sector in the UK, where National Public Health policy focus, in the eyes at least of researchers such as Shaw and Crompton (2003), is moving toward individual action, and individual social capital, rather than exploring the social embeddedness of many aspects of poor health. Accountability mechanisms in service reporting are moving to support this individualised focus of government initiative, thereby ignoring the systemic factors in illhealth. All these pressures both weaken our relational bonds and cloud our understanding of the contextual embeddedness in which we work and live, and which influences our capacity to achieve our goals.

If in responding to ‘calls for accountability’ organizations are in themselves creating environments in which perverse outcomes are occurring, then to persist in this direction, without calling attention to these findings, is perverse (Long, 2001). To continue along the ‘accountability’ path without further understanding the impacts of these harms is dangerous. It is ‘persistent in error….’. The original drives toward accountability clearly did not have an original intent of harm, but if it can be shown that harm is occurring, then we must draw attention to the denial of reality which perversity entails, and to the harms in ‘social relatedness’ that it gives rise to, in that it is “out of alignment with a mutually beneficial contract between the people involved” (Long, 2001, p.14).

One possible resolution of these tensions would be to join the ranks of those who might argue that internally managed program evaluation risks too much compromise in ‘truth and objectivity’, a view perhaps most forcefully (and influentially) put by Scriven (1993), but also others (McTaggart et al, 1991; Stake, 1998; Simons, 2005), who emphasize the influence of an organization’s policies and underlying value systems on the evaluator. In developing these lines of thought, such writers assume that an external evaluator will be less affected by organizational pressures than an internal evaluator, about whom Weiss (1998) says, a lingering suspicion exists. However, external evaluators are not immune either from “lingering suspicion”, in that they are often dependent on maintaining a positive reputation and repeat business.
However for me these lines of argument, while raising important issues for debate and consideration, bypass the opportunity (perhaps I should say the necessity) to develop a more critical perspective on exploring what individual, organizational and societal factors shape the diverse ways in which evaluation is taken up and used in organizations, and in particular, the dynamics which lead to distortion of professional evaluation to organizational ends.

We could take the view that those more interested in the notion of ‘evaluation for learning’ should remove themselves from the organizational environments described by Elliot and Fielding and Shaw and Crompton, and concentrate where energies are best spent, with individuals and organizations who appear to genuinely wish to engage in supported episodes of evaluation for learning. This stance might also be, like the championing of evaluation practice within the Regional Department, an unrealistic flight from reality.

We need to continue to add to this ‘critical evaluation’ literature, so as we can make a contribution to increasing knowledge about evaluation practice, and encourage the contribution to research agendas which provide insight into the dynamics which bring out the harms which I have documented in this thesis. We need more people to be aware of the potential harms of evaluation, and encourage program staff and evaluation practitioners to speak out with the knowledge that they are not alone in their concerns.

8.3.2 Evaluation in coercive contexts

It is likely that mandatory evaluation in public sector organizations is requiring coercion of staff and program clients to fulfill its requirements. That evaluation could be seen as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, is contained in the Manifesto of “Our Community” (2003), an Australian organization which seeks to support community groups develop social capital. The manifesto records that

Too often community groups spend their precious time, resources and energy on completing evaluations rather than on finding creative new approaches to their
work, and see little evidence that their evaluative efforts are being used to improve policy, guide programs, or assist other groups (p.11).

This perspective from “Our Community” is principally a perspective from the East-West axis of the Compass model, and is particularly concerning, given public policy aspirations for community engagement and the research evidence about the links between locus of control over one’s life, and ill-health (Griffin et al, 2002). Kenny (2002) has also pointed to what she calls a justifiably cynical approach by members of the community toward evaluation research. There are both health and moral repercussions of practices which coercively engage individuals and groups in activities which they believe may be harming their capacities to improve their own situation.

Some writers have argued that control and censorship has infiltrated Institutional Ethics Committees (Lincoln and Tierney, 2004, p.220), where these committees are seen by some as guardians of the institution in which they based, and hence have lost their original mission. It remains to be seen if evaluation practice can resist the coercive, dominant forces within organizations to control and censorship.

It is likely that imposed evaluation reduces the innate self organizing tendencies of individuals to address their own workplace issues with engagement and ownership. If staff groups can be assisted with extra resources in a creative manner, and create their own orientation to their own evaluative inquiry, this may produce a greater capacity among them to draw attention to issues for the betterment of their services (Muetzelfeldt, 2003). I would also argue that professional people across the board give more attention to the difficult but rewarding pursuit of practice research.

I have argued in this thesis that evaluation within the Department began to take on some attributes of ideology, ideology in the sense that, in a turbulent period, attempts are made to enrol others to the values and beliefs which are offered as explanations of things that will save us (Coopey, 1996). In the Department in this case study, the belief into which people were to be enrolled was the benefit of engaging in program evaluation. The emancipatory interest in this thesis is to help loosen the grip of administrative ideology of any form on the practice of evaluation, to redress this imbalance, to try to uncover and
elucidate how these pressures toward an ideological perspective on evaluation arise and are maintained, and to propose some aspects of evaluation practice which, if reaffirmed, could help redress this imbalance.

8.4 Recommendations for evaluation in performative climates

I propose four perspectives which contribute to evaluation practice within the contexts in which it works. First is the necessity for evaluation practitioners to seek closer, but carefully negotiated working relationships with practitioners who deliver projects. The second is to seek ways to shift the discourse to accountability to one of responsibility. The third is to seek more cohesion around the issue of authority. The fourth is to examine ways to create a learning space, picking up on the Winnicottian idea of the holding environment, as a container for learning.

8.4.1 Reorienting to practice

The enormity of the unintended consequences of the valency for evaluation to be taken over by managerial concerns, leads me to the view that the future of evaluative inquiry could be best thought of as a ‘modality’, an enhancement of the managerial and practitioner role, rather than to aim to develop as a separate profession. House (1993) proposes that evaluation might develop not as a profession, but as a transdiscipline like logic or statistics, “a discipline in its own right, but one that services other disciplines and is an integral part of other disciplinary endeavours” (p.86). While this stance addresses some of my concerns, I think that this still will require too much emphasis on ‘specialism’. This emphasis might occur at the cost of seeking to support and develop those managers and staff in organizations and projects who will not, in my view, be best served by another party, such as an evaluation practitioner, internal or external to their own organizational boundaries. I think such managers and staff could be assisted in a process more akin to evaluative inquiry as a form of organizational development (Patton, 1999; Campbell and McClintock, 2002).

To my mind, it is no accident that some of the strongest critique of accountability mechanisms impacting negatively in education are coming from those steeped in education (Ball, 2003; Elliot, 2001; Fielding, 2000, 2001; Schwandt, 2005; Kushner,
2002; House, 1997), whose ‘professional’, practitioner concerns arise from experience with the damage which is being done to the relational task of teaching. Critique of a field of study, a domain of practice interest, is most credible when the professional concerns raised from the practice setting speak also to “societal” concerns. The societal task of teaching is the passion and commitment of these writers in education who are critiquing the impact of accountability measures. It is not surprising that several of the critics come from a strong tradition where evaluation and education have developed together, and have produced a strong body of knowledge and critique such as is found in ‘democratic evaluation’ (MacDonald, 1987; Kushner, 2000, 2002; House, 1986).

I think we as evaluators need to seek engagement with practitioners within their own professional domains of concern, using a range of participatory practices. There is already a significant practice in evaluative inquiry in the action research and participatory action research domain which can be built on. I think the radical critique will come only from within those groups in society who have knowledge, skills, experience and commitment to the work of society when those societal tasks are being perverted. I don’t think this critique will come from the ‘generic’ evaluator, who on some models of evaluation, has removed herself from the practice interests and concerns of professionals, and is hovering somewhere ‘above’. In this situation, the practitioner delivering the service is only one of several stakeholders, no more, no less. Schwandt (2005) has been active in the evaluation community, in identifying some of the concerns inherent in evaluators adopting such aloof and elevated attitudes to practitioners. He shows how these attitudes shape an approach which presuppose the imperfection of social implementation, and the need for repair of these processes, repair which can be offered particularly by more science based solutions to problems of practice. These approaches can and often do deemphasize and devalue the activities and relationships which constitute many service delivery programs.

A broad reading of the evaluation literature gleans the impression that staff in programs are awaiting some insight from outside, from new knowledge created for them by others, which they must then integrate into their practice. What is often overlooked, is the simple yet profound idea, that effective performance of a primary task is a major source of satisfaction for staff (Menzies Lyth, 1988). Writers in evaluation, such as Schwandt (2005) and Preskill and Torres (1999), suggest that we might reconsider evaluation practice as practice with practitioners, and that we seek to ground our practice within
relationships within the field. Preskill and Torres (1999) express this perspective in this way: “knowing through relationships is something we ought to explore as an epistemology for an evaluation practice that is devoted to answering the questions: are we doing the right thing, and are we doing it well?” (p.55).

That is not to say that evaluation will always find a productive climate within professional groups for ‘evaluation for learning’. Many professional groups are labouring under harsh work conditions, where there appears to be very little recognition of the need for ‘space’ within which the service they are engaged in can be reflectively reviewed by themselves and others, with a view to learning. However, if evaluation practice is to link more consciously to professional practice, this will also require that it garner support to assist with the often-difficult task of “facing facts”, and engaging in what Boxer (2004) calls a “constructive disobedience” to a “preconceived certainty” (p.40). “Constructive disobedience” in performative organizational environments will require courage, and companionship. As Simons points out in her scholarship on evaluation and ethics, it is advisable not to dance with the devil on your own (Simons, 2005, in press). Seeking companions with some orientation to “constructive disobedience” will be vital.

8.4.2 Revisiting the moral norm of responsibility

I have discussed in the previous section that one way forward is to more closely link with practitioners in the domains of practice to which we wish to contribute. I am particularly interested in those domains where the service is being delivered through the medium of a set of social relations. In such programs one must acknowledge and respect the fact that in many cases, it is the relationship which is essential to the task of understanding how the service is being delivered.

It is within these social relations that the idea of responsibility begins to have shape and meaning. I would like now to develop some ideas arising from the centrality of relationship as the medium through which work is carried out, and how this might open up more productive channels of inquiry into issues of responsibility, more productive that is, than the discourse of accountability captured by New Public Management.
The Encyclopedia of Bioethics (Post, 2004) provides a useful summary of the concept of responsibility.

Responsibility has emerged as a central ethical category, directing attention to human beings as moral actors. It highlights the importance for ethical understanding of selfconscious moral commitments, discretion in moral judgment, personal strengths necessary to effective action, a wise use of the power and authority of societal offices, and accountability to oneself and to fellow human beings, perhaps also to God, for moral judgment and action (p. 2380).

New Public Management gives little credence to the idea of a professional relationship as a means through which to explore issues of responsibility. Gray and Jenkins (1993) have noted that under the ‘old administrative model’, professionals were cast as self-serving, and this is one of the issues NPM seeks to address. The claims that all professionals are self serving, and that individuals are inclined to exploit each other are points around which we might focus and engage in what Boxer (2004) terms “constructive disobedience”. During the MI project association, I saw many examples of the sorts of relatedness and sense of responsibility toward program clients from program staff, and program clients to each other as members of rural communities trying to be responsive on behalf of themselves and others, for the wider good of the sector. Yet this discourse remained unwritten and intangible, and hence in some senses, illegitimate and or irrelevant. In Fletcher’s (1998) study of female engineers, such relational work got “disappeared”, either through the efforts of the system, or, in some cases, when there was no support for the relational way of working, by the female engineers themselves (her research subjects), often voicing, in their retreat, self doubt ultimately about its value.

In mutual inquiry efforts, under difficult political and interpersonal conditions, the most fragile thing of all is connectedness (or what some of us might call “love” if there wasn’t such a powerful prohibition on mentioning such an emotive state!). What can thrive in its absence is fear – on both sides. (Wadsworth cited in Patton, 1997, p. 368).
Several researchers, like Wadsworth, have commented on the strong prescriptions within organizational climates to avoid the reality of ‘care’ as a phenomenon which is not only part of our motivation, but part of the glue by which we can achieve what we do as professionals. Davies’ (1995) work in nursing, Ebenstein (1998) in social work, Acker (1999) in teaching, Martin et al (1998) in business, and Fineman (1997) in management provide examples of the scholarship of care. Perhaps we should seek out the points of intersection between those conditions within work environments which make this natural human desire of caring within a task focused work relationship unrealistic, and explore these intersections more fully, as part of our responses to ‘accountability’. In work environments where accountability remains stuck in the North-South administrative axis, individuals are often unable to deliver what they see as their responsibility to deliver. To anchor inquiry into these spaces may provide some of what is missing in the accountability rhetoric – an engagement by people in their work tasks which they experience as harmful to the relationships they are seeking to cultivate, in order to work toward some agreed purpose. Hoggett’s (2003; 2005) scholarship on these relational demands in public sector work is particularly insightful. The link between the idea of relationship within this agreed purpose, what Reed (2000) terms “‘relatedness” is expressed in Ricouer’s phrase, “Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my action before another” (Ricoeur, 1992, p.180).

The idea of responsibility as something that is a quality within each of us as human beings, a quality which is part of our human condition, is part of what Gregory (1995) captures in his critique of ‘accountability’, a critique which leads him to suggest that we might explore the idea of responsibility. Gregory (1995, p.60) draws on the work of Mosher (1968), who describes two sorts of responsibility – an objective responsibility and a subjective responsibility. The latter, the subjective responsibility, is to be understood as a felt sense of obligation. It is not only ‘upward looking”, in a hierarchical sense, “but it may be experienced as a pull in other directions, to a number of ‘significant others’. Mosher holds that subjective responsibility, unlike objective responsibility, is the stuff of moral dilemmas (Gregory, 1995, p.60). This call to be aware of our ‘felt sense of obligation’, and to bring this into our organizational discourse, might provide the opportunity for the level of engagement between program leaders and program staff, and program staff and program clients, to be thought about differently. It could offer another discourse altogether from the more instrumental accountability discourse, or the self-
promotion of the performativity discourse. The direction of this responsibility might link with that suggested by Mumby and Putnam (1992) who offer a feminist reading of Simon’s idea of “bounded rationality”, and suggest we might think of “bounded emotionality”, which they introduce as an alternative organizing construct, in which nurturance, caring, community, supportiveness, and interrelatedness are fused with individual responsibility to shape organizational experiences. They argue we need to move beyond the dichotomy of rationality and emotionality and explore new grounds for future work. Gilligan (1988) and Noddings (1984) have highlighted the ethic of care as one way to strengthen our relational responsibilities, and out of which an alternative discourse can be developed. Mosher’s ‘felt sense of obligation’ might provide one way to consider reducing the bifurcation which exists between ‘evaluation for accountability’ and ‘evaluation for learning’, and to show one way to move toward a shared ground for new work. Brady (2000) suggests we might be mindful of Levinas’s call for ‘solicitude’, which she says is a ‘feeling of responsibility for, and mutuality for, others and the natural world” (p.511). Two of those concepts which Arendt (1968) names as in need of invigorating, bringing them back from the empty shells they have become, are responsibility and virtue (p.15).

The ideas of extending the discourse of responsibility by reference to an ethic of care, of mutual relatedness, are not ideas with no concrete link to the work we do. As I have been emphasizing, relationships in most work settings, are the vehicles for the work, and are the medium through which we experience the mutuality of our other relationships, such as with the natural world. It is interesting to note that for some it is easier to relate to the finite resource held within our relationship with the natural world (in relation for example to the implications of an exploitative relationship with our planet), than to the implications of the growing concern that our relationship with one another can become exploitative, in performatative organizational climates.

The systems psychodynamic literature, in particular, the use of Kleinian Object Relations theory, reminds us that the idea of our interdependence as humans lies at the heart of our humanity. The contribution of Kleinian theory is its strength in elaborating this essential human aspect - that we are arguably never really individuals – we exist, from the moment of our conception, always in relationship to others. John Donne’s poetic phrase, ‘No man is an island’, captures this idea. How we communicate is, in part, how we become human
– one to the other. Kleinian theory also gives us an understanding of why this state of interdependence, while part of our humanity, is also a part against which we build defences. It is one of the emotional states that Klein argued sets up a particular defence, a defence against the vulnerability exposed by the state of dependency, and hence interdependency. The vulnerability this exposes is, in this theory, a far greater restraint on our actions than most other forces in organizational life. So while the idea of recognizing our interdependence is a relatively simple idea, its enactment is among the most difficult things we can do in our lives.

As the very basis of our connectedness, the idea of our interdependence can also be seen as the means through which we can develop stronger collaborative relationships. The stronger the collaboration, the more chance we have of reducing the uncertainty that we all face. Marris’s (1996) work is apt on this point. He notes that collaboration is dependent on one’s view that others will collaborate in return. He says that it is always tempting to revert to competitive strategies that impose control without reciprocity, because collaborating involves patience, understanding, and self-restraint, “and there is always some risk that you or your collaborators may prove unable or unwilling to honour their undertaking” (p.198)

Nussbaum (2001) tells us of the Greek poet Pindar, who encouraged us to achieve a range of attributes of human excellence, one of which was the ability to develop “confirming associations” with other human beings (p.1) This would be a good yardstick to judge evaluations by – to what degree do the processes used in evaluation practice contribute to the task of individual, groups and communities developing confirming associations with one another. These questions do not sit well beside the market rationality dominated by economic and technological imperatives.

Long (2001) has noted that the perverse state of mind flourishes where instrumental relations have dominance in society (p.6). I have drawn a picture of a project and Departmental environment in which instrumental relations were dominant, and the unhappy story which followed can be seen in large part as due to the impoverished nature of those instrumental relationships. Like Gregory (1995), Long sees the need to develop a discourse around ‘social obligation’ in which we might use a series of terms seldom heard in current organizational climates: – “vow, pledge, honour, respect, fidelity, duty,
and integrity” (p. 15) She finds the culture of perversion draws more on exploitation than obligation. We need to find and employ language and behaviours that challenge this perversion.

These efforts at working more toward our social responsibility to one another, staff and clients, managers and staff, evaluation practitioners and staff and managers, will necessitate closer attention to many issues. I will finish with a discussion of two key issues that cannot be avoided, although, to my detriment, I did not heed them as closely when I commenced my fieldwork. One is the task of being more mindful of the nature of the authority for evaluation work. The other is the necessity in any work we do, to work toward the creation of a ‘learning space’ as a container for the immensely difficult work of confronting our vulnerability and working together, a necessary step in any relationship of interdependency.

8.4.3 Authority

In thinking about and grounding a discussion on the question of authority, I have located myself for the purposes of this discussion, as a person assisting workplace inquiry, under a management and leadership approach in which issues of authority can be explicitly negotiated, with management, and with staff. This is itself a large assumption, and even with more experience and being better prepared, I don’t believe these ‘conditions’ would have been available to me in the Department, given the mandatory nature of the evaluation requirement, and the approaches favoured to pursue evaluation.

Ideally, practitioners in services need to be encouraged to seek the authority to claim a space in which to engage in evaluative inquiry, both as a right and as a responsibility. For evaluation to align more closely with professional groups and work with them toward the creation of structured spaces in work environments also brings with it one of the strengths of a professional pursuit, which is the possibility of calling on assistance from their professional peers in related fields, from outside their organization. Chattopadahay and Malhotra (1991) hold that when people can think through problems using their own authority, and “consequently feel responsible and accountable for implementing what they decide”, non hierarchic structures and processes will be supported (p.582) This is crucial, in the model of evaluative inquiry which I am suggesting, that those professions
whose practice goes to make up the program which is being offered, are able to fully engage with and authorize the assistance from the evaluator, and do so of their own free will, with their engagement and input. Evaluation, in this sense, is very much a collaborative model. So too must their managers feel encouraged to assist staff in creating the environment in which evaluative inquiry might find root.

Patton makes the point in talking about his work with practitioners, that he works through their managers to ensure they are provided with the appropriate resources and authority with which to work with him (personal communication, 2004). This sort of support may not be immediately available to staff, but they may be assisted to negotiate this themselves, and make this part of their learning. Should their efforts to gain authorization to explore their work not be successful, there will be limited scope for the sorts of evaluative inquiry suggested here.

8.4.4 Creating spaces for “facing facts”

If as I have argued, the uncertainty of environments is a key factor in creating the tendencies in organizations to develop mechanistic, controlling organizational measures, what expectations and arrangements might assist in the task of creating an awareness of the need to tolerate a certain level of anxiety. My own stance for my professional future is to try to contribute through developing collaborative relationships with workplaces interested in strengthening practices with their staff, and in being open to the importance of the need to develop workplace structures which can contain the anxiety while exploring the difficult interface between the North-South axis and the East West axis.

Boxer (2004) suggests we strive to question preconceived certainties, and “face facts”. He draws on Simpson’s account of Keat’s idea of ‘negative capability’ – the capacity to hold still in relation to ignorance for long enough to allow learning to take place – which in turn requires a “capacity for containing anxiety that stretches managers and clinicians alike beyond reason” (Boxer, 2004, citing Simpson et al, 2002, p.20). Trying to create an evaluative space may assist staff in organizations to use evaluative inquiry to assist them to locate and name the issues which they are drawn to, using their own sense of responsibility. The space that is created risks being filled by senior managers needing positive data on organizational performance for image management purposes. Locating
accountability within a discourse of ‘relational responsibility’, as argued for by McNamee and Gergen (1999), may provide one avenue for exploration. Such an exploration will require careful exploration of one’s sense of relational responsibilities, particularly where there are multiple and at times conflicting program purposes. Other dissonances will also arise from engaging in a more developmental role for evaluation, which would require confronting the tensions in the role of internal consultant (Gangjee, 1986).

It is not only critical that evaluation practitioners try and create an evaluative space for staff to be able to explore the complexities they face in carrying out their work, it is also critical that evaluation practitioners themselves create the space for their own support while carrying out evaluation work. An understanding systems psychodynamics helps us see how open we are to being “filled up” with the projections of others, such that we might be asked to carry the hope of how things might go well, and the despair when things do not go well. Holding a steady course while working in highly charged environments, often alone, makes it essential that evaluation practitioners attend to their own needs for the space that will maximize the chance of the evaluation presence being a contribution to organizational life, and not one of its casualties, or indeed, its oppressors.

One possible way of managing oneself more ably particularly when one is engaging in “insider research” as an evaluation practitioner, is to engage in “Organizational Role Analysis”, or ORA, a process used to examine the role found, made and taken up by a person in their work. ORA places emphasis on the lived working experience of the role holder, within the organization setting with its attendant purposes, systems and boundaries, and seeks to assist the person in a particular role to take up that role such that their authority relationships, responsibilities, accountabilities and relationships are understood more clearly (Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006). Such an approach could significantly address the now well documented challenges of researching an organization “from within” (Platt, 1981; Coghlan & Brannick, 2001).

Evaluation frameworks lack responsibility if they treat the contested nature of workplaces as unproblematic, and do not examine the barriers to the democratic intent we aspire to. Not articulating that processes of inquiry will, in most cases, necessitate the management of conflictual issues, denudes the special role of the public service as primarily a site “for the enactment of particular kinds of social relations” (Hoggett, 2003, p.2). If the content
of evaluation training within departments continues to support Fitzpatrick’s claim that methodological issues remain the ‘sine qua non of evaluation’ (Fitzpatrick, 1999, p.6 cited by Simons, 2005, in press), this will add to the likelihood that the focus will remain on extracting detail from program clients for performance information rather than genuine inquiry. In focusing on data collection as a key aspect of Departmental evaluation practice, Departmental evaluation processes bypassed the opportunity to address the systemic issues of the sort of organizational environment necessary “to sustain the difficult work in the conflictual contexts we live and work in, contexts which are an essential condition for the vitality in public life” (Hoggett, 2003, p.4).

**Systems psychodynamics in evaluation**

One of the contributions of systems psychodynamics to the field of evaluation practice, is that it suggests that the projections that occur between people are part of unconscious agreements which are held, that they operate to maintain defensive perceptions of one another, and that these projections are also operating at a broader systemic level (Krantz, 1990). How ready are producers to think of bureaucrats other than as people who waste their tax dollar? How ready are managers in the bureaucracy to think of producers as other than people who are, as one MI program leader said, always on the lookout to “kick shit out of government”? Lipsky’s (1980) work talked of “assaults on the ego which the structure of street level work normally delivers” (p.152). In the absence of a safe structure in which to explore these projections, they are likely to continue. This is in part what a learning space might endeavour to do. If evaluation cannot work toward creating the space in which these matters can be explored, the projections are likely to remain intact, and remain as curtains, dividers, between the various parties. Without the capacity to explore these projections, rigorous evaluation methodologies are likely to deepen the divisions that by nature exist in most fields of complex endeavour.

There is a large amount of literature that explores this idea of a learning space from a systems psychodynamic perspective. It is a complex idea, with complex dynamics involved and many threads to attend to. Among such threads are the background of the group, the degree to which they have been able to agree on the key issues they are working on, whether they are representatives of others, and if so, what their authority is to develop their role within the group. One central idea is the process of containment, a
concept that has been touched on in Chapter 3, and is informed by the work of the early psychodynamic scholars. It was Winnicott who first used the term containment in this sense. Others have developed the idea in terms of interventions in organizations. Gould (1993) describes containment as “an environment that provides a sense of psychological safety within which work can productively be accomplished and people can grow and develop in their roles” (p.61).

The role of leader is critical in creating this space (Vansina, 2002; Smircich & Morgan, 1982), and is a key reason to link the presence of evaluation to the capacity of an organization to provide the sort of leadership required to facilitate such a space, as the evaluation practitioner will not have, and usually ought not have, this authority. This is difficult work and requires considerable skill, experience and an appreciation of how a work setting, including its structure, group and social dynamics, culture, and operating methods, inhibits or amplifies a leader and staff members’ potential (Gould, 1993, p. 53). This sort of intervention might be one that Campbell and McClintock (2002) had in mind in their argument for a combined role for evaluation and organizational development.

Organizations and their management have the tendency in performative climates, to treat people as if they are not needed (as perhaps managers feel they are themselves treated), that what is relevant is only what is ‘seen to count’, not the people who make it happen. The social defences, shaped within the rationality project, create a split between place and outcome, time and place. Producers participate with government, then find their efforts and investment overtaken by a systemic requirement to minimise their shared activities; staff are encouraged to participate, to evaluate, to be inquiring, with renewed encouragement through each cycle of projectification, and find their efforts to seek reliable pictures of their reality are overridden by other organizational requirements.

The prevalence of evaluation in the daily life of projects, when it unwittingly contributes to the empty rhetoric which much of the accountability discourse has become, and without the proper authority to create a learning space in which to seriously engage in inquiry, is irresponsible. I believe we should add our voices to the growing discontent with the instrumentalizing of a range of social processes and practices, including evaluation. This thesis is a contribution toward a further understanding of the forces
behind the instrumentalizing of evaluation, and toward the naming of some of the structural changes which might reduce this trend.
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Suppressed Citations

Appendix 1 (Suppressed) Global Template Logic
Appendix 2  (Suppressed)  Framework for Developing a Project Evaluation Strategy
Appendix 3  A price tag for performativity

I recount below the rationale for a series of Departmental meetings convened to explore within this product area, ways of measuring productivity and the relationship which might exist between Departmental programming and productivity. I did a very broad costing of these meetings, as a way of demonstrating the value placed on this activity, activity where the key outcome aspired to was the finding of a method of demonstrating the value of Departmental programs to the question of productivity. I believe this story gives an insight into the priorities of, and dominance of, the North-South administrative axis.

I attended a series of meetings within this product group, of senior staff from both this group and from the Economics Branch, which were called “economic evaluation” meetings. “Economic evaluation” was a process projects were expected to carry out, in addition to the “ordinary evaluation” processes which I was part of. The “economic evaluation” effort across the Department was led by the Departmental economics branch. The task of the meetings held within this product group of staff, was to arrive at a set of questions to be asked of producers about their activities on a range of production practices which were talked of as representing “drivers of economic productivity”. The presumption was made that it would be through the analysis of these activities, these drivers, against particular producer net incomes, that a series of benchmarks would be arrived at, to guide the Department’s performance measurement of its programs against these benchmarks. Put simply, if a particular production activity was associated with a higher income, the use of such a technique could be seen to be a productivity driver, and any departmental program that assisted the adoption of that technique, would, by proxy measure, be assisting in the overall productivity of that commodity group.

Three such meetings were called to pursue the “economic evaluation” task, resulting in the drafting of 20 questions across the interests of those within this product group, of which the MI project held one key interest, that of improved marketing practices. Of the 20 questions, 7 were finally selected for inclusion in the “economic evaluation” research. Usually about 20 people were present at these “economic evaluation” meetings, which usually lasted 4-6 hours. On a very conservative estimate of number of Departmental officers (20) and numbers of meetings (360 hours), and excluding travel time and costs, allowing for a salary figure of $60 per hour, this component of (Economic Evaluation)
work cost $22,000. These costs did not include the cost of the actual research, the process of putting these questions to the producers. My point here is not to question the assumptions of the work, although I also did that in the course of these meetings, as did some senior officers present at the meetings, although typically in a manner of resignation rather than protest, but to point to the cost to which the Department was prepared to go to locate information to judge its performance, essentially a North-South administrative task, rather than to invest in developing relationships of key parties engaged in what could have been seen as a co-production of a project, the development of lateral, network relationships which are required to drive a more collaborative approach to governance (Streeck and Schmitter, 1985).
Appendix 4  (Suppressed) Threatening project images

Both images were developed by a consultant graphic artist, and were used in project brochures and other publicity material.