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INTRODUCTION
Special Edition

Work in progress: crises, choices and continuity

This issue of the International Journal of Employment Studies includes four papers from the 24th Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ) Conference held in Sydney in February 2010. The conference’s theme, ‘Work in progress: crises, choices and continuity’, is well represented by these three papers. They deal with issues of long-term concern to both Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management academics and practitioners: occupational health and safety; diversity management; and the work experiences of recent immigrants. However, each issue is addressed from quite novel perspectives, opening up each area to further debate and comment.

Terri Mylett’s paper examines the concept of ‘safety culture’, assessing both its conceptual coherence and empirical effectiveness. The concept has been used to apprehend both the complexity and, in conjunction with ‘management systems’, the range of OHS issues. The paper reveals how ‘safety culture’ can be understood as both a medium and an outcome of social practice. As a framework for analysis, ‘safety culture’, though, can have definite pitfalls. These include, for example, the conflation of culture and practice, and a tendency to focus on workers’ perceptions of safety rather than the elimination or reduction of actual hazards and risks. Consequently, frontline workers, rather than their organisations, may have to shoulder the blame for OHS problems. Mylett adopts a critical realist approach, which can integrate different research methods, to apprehend the
intersecting values, assumptions, relationships and contexts that constitute contemporary workplace health and safety issues.

The second paper, by Sue Johnston and Julian Teicher, also constructs a critical perspective on a much-researched area. They suggest that, despite the volume of research conducted on diversity management (DM) over recent decades, it may be time to search for a ‘new paradigm’ if employment equity is to be achieved for women in professional and management positions. Most significantly, flexible work practices, widely seen as enabling more equitable outcomes, have been implemented in ways that often reinforce the traditional ‘male breadwinner’ model. DM, then, is not working for this group of women. Women in these positions who pursue flexible work practices are perceived in many cases as having removed themselves from a career ladder based on a ‘male model of work’. Despite an array of legislative and policy initiatives, limited headway has been made towards eroding entrenched institutional impediments. Johnston and Teicher develop a persuasive case that future debates and research intended to advance flexibility and equity should extend to new areas that can expand the possibilities of a ‘new paradigm’.

Perhaps an even more daunting array of obstacles confronts dual-career migrant couples, including those with children – the focus of Susan Ressia’s paper. The paper explores how their labour market opportunities are constrained by such ongoing problems as language difficulties, inability to have their skills recognised and lack of local work history. Often compounding their situations is the need to navigate the labour market as a couple, which can lead to many being
consigned to low-paid, peripheral employment – a situation experienced with the greatest severity by migrant women workers. As in the discussion by Johnstone and Teicher, the ‘male breadwinner’ model is widespread, and policy, training and research have been concentrated on the male migrant. Drawing on the stories of twelve migrant couples in southeast Queensland, Ressia illustrates how they are affected by various social and cultural norms, with many migrant women being placed in especially difficult situations. Where both partners are seeking employment, women’s careers are often subordinated to male careers and family commitments.

We hope that these three papers will contribute to further debate around the theme of ‘crisis, choices and continuity’. Each indicates how intractable workplace and labour market problems can often be, while also illustrating alternative ways to address them. Each paper has been reviewed by at least two referees, in a double-blind process – we would like to thank the original AIRAANZ reviewers and the reviewers for the International Journal of Employment Studies for their invaluable contributions. We would particularly like to thank Stephen Teo, editor of International Journal of Employment Studies, for the opportunity to publish these expanded versions of the original AIRAANZ conference papers.

The final paper in this issue, by Mohd. Anuar Arsha and Brenda Scott-Ladd, addresses the Malaysian government's adoption of organisational learning. Drawing on an extensive study across four industries, the paper illustrates how there is a preference for internal learning strategies, although external learning strategies are also quite widespread. Arshad and Scott-Ladd document the considerable array of formal and informal methodologies (for example, self-learning) that
have been used. They do, though, raise a significant concern: that some organisations appear reluctant to pursue strategies designed to empower employees. Still, as Arshad and Scott-Ladd indicate, there is substantial evidence of successful organisational learning strategies – this should encourage their more general implementation.

Alison Barnes
George Lafferty
SAFETY CULTURE: CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESEARCH METHOD

Terri Mylett
University of Western Sydney

Abstract
This paper explores the concept of safety culture and the research method appropriate to empirically analyse safety culture. Safety culture might be commonly defined as concrete practice (‘the way we do things around here’, from Schein), but when looking for ways of improving practice, there is a tendency to emphasise what employees think and value, which then suggests that individuals must be at fault when things go wrong. Safety culture is about ‘collective mindfulness’ (Weick and Sutcliffe 2007), but our common sense tells us that thoughts and values are properties of individuals. The paper takes the findings and analysis of Hopkins (2005, 2008) around safety culture as a departure point to go further into some of the conceptual conundrums of the terms ‘safety culture’ and ‘mindfulness’. As Antonsen (2009) argues, safety culture is both a medium and outcome of social practice, and interactivity should be emphasised as the unit of analysis. Critical realist method’s utility for safety culture research will be explained.

INTRODUCTION
Managers and workers face many challenges in securing health, safety and welfare of people around the hazards that arise from work. Putting aside questions of stakeholders’
motivators and competing interests, securing health, safety and welfare is difficult in practical terms. Hazards at work are numerous and many are difficult to foresee, eliminate or control. It is not just that each workplace has unique hazards, but so does each job at any given moment. Changes to work routines or adoption of new technologies and materials create new hazards; some hazards are beyond the perception and understanding of all but scientists, such as nanotechnologies.

Labour processes in agriculture, construction and mining change the work context on a regular basis and therefore change the hazards. Work is not always contained in discrete controllable locations; for example, truck drivers are the occupation in Australia with the highest fatality rate (Safe Work Australia 2009). There are also the risks that arise from exposure to other people’s behaviour or diseases. Quinlan, Bohle and Lamm’s (2010) hazard categorisation discussion illustrates how difficult hazard identification can be. Their review of the many disciplines that have evolved to address hazards and understand occupational health and safety (OHS) alerts us to the need for expertise in the knowledge and methods of the natural and social sciences to improve safety and health, from epidemiology to ergonomics to engineering to employment relations.

The safety culture concept is one avenue for addressing the OHS challenge. It has the requisite complexity. It concerns the frames of reference, values and attitudes around a commitment to safety management, complementing an OHS ‘management system’; avoiding complacency through ‘mindfulness’ that disaster is always possible is an illustration (Hopkins 2005, 2008; Weick and Sutcliffe 2007). Culture is
often discussed in terms of practice (following Schein’s 1992 ‘the way we do things around here’ approach, in Hopkins 2005:7), because practice is considered to be the manifestation of values, attitudes and assumptions.

Hopkins’ detailed case study research has demonstrated repeatedly that values, attitudes and assumption are pertinent for OHS. However, Hopkins alerts us to dangerous susceptibilities in the utilisation of the safety culture concept. Hopkins recognises that there is a risk that an emphasis on culture will lead to an approach to OHS that emphasises changing frontline workers’ thoughts and values ahead of eliminating hazards and controlling risks. That is, a cultural emphasis can be used to support an ideological stance of ‘blame the victim’ (Quinlan et al. 2010) ahead of a superior ideology of ‘blame the system’ in the face of adverse events.

The reason that safety culture has this susceptibility lies in the conceptual conundrum around the unsustainable idea that organisations can be ‘mindful’. The common sense view that this is impossible leads to the view that individual frontline workers must individually develop and demonstrate a safety culture. If the spatial problem between individuals and organisations/collectives is unpicked through a focus on interactivity, then the susceptibility of safety culture towards a ‘blame the victim’ ideology may be lessened.

A focus on interactivity points us to a study of relations in context (Antonsen 2009). Much OHS research recognises the importance of context, in that case study research is a dominant paradigm, rivalling the use of survey research and other quantitative studies (Guldenmund 2007). Studying interrelations in context is best understood through critical
realist method. Critical realism works well for the complexity of variables, relations and contexts that play a role in OHS, especially so as the safety culture is inherently spatial given that it is emergent from a number of levels of analysis. A metaphor for emergence is that of a mosaic. The collective (mosaic) consists of individual (tiles) but the mosaic is more than just the properties of each tile in aggregate. The mosaic and tiles are interconstitutive; one gives meaning to the other, but they are irreducible from each other (Massey 1995).

The first part of this paper provides an overview of effective approaches to OHS by considering, firstly, OHS management systems, and secondly, safety culture. The importance of developing a culture of safety is discussed. The second part of the paper works on the conceptual problems of safety culture and how these conceptual problems can lead to the concept’s misuse. The final section of the paper turns to demonstrating how critical realist method, with its emphasis on interactivity and contextualised relations, is useful for studying complex spatial phenomenon such as safety culture.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO OHS MANAGEMENT
There is decades’ worth of knowledge around hazard control and risk reduction that has emerged and influenced OHS management, encouraged by regulators. Contemporary approaches to OHS emphasise the adoption of an OHS management system (OHSMS) that focuses on risk assessment, rather than compiling, and complying with, prescriptive regulation to control particular hazards (Bluff and Gunningham 2004). For example, Standards Australia has a guide to managing safety that organisational theorists would identify as being part of the rational management school,
with step by step directions to developing management tools and organisational knowledge to reduce risk. The leadership and commitment of top management is emphasised, and leaders are to consult with frontline workers in the identification and control of hazards, as well as in assessments of risks.

Researching, record-keeping, auditing, and evaluating are practices that are to underpin ongoing learning and improvement (AS/NZS 4804: 2001 Occupational health and safety management systems). Antonsen (2009: 9) sees such approaches as based on American management theory, developed with the goal of controlling workers to reduce the impact of ‘human error’.

There seems to be a number of strands of research in the evolution of OHSMS. Early studies concerned the ‘human factor’ in safety engineering. Antonsen (2009: 13) cites the work of Turner (1978) as the first theorist to study adverse events as processes rather than sudden unexpected occurrences. Safer organisations were those that recognised dangers associated with repeated procedural violations. This has cultural aspects, as recognition of danger depends on an organisation’s perceptions and beliefs; that is, a particular frame of reference that supports or suppresses recognition of risk.

Lessons from organisations where an adverse event has potentially catastrophic consequences, from contexts such as airlines, nuclear reactors, and petrochemical plants, have further developed such approaches. Reason (1997) describes this approach as learning from ‘high reliability organisations’. That is, knowledge for OHS management systems has
developed from exceptional case studies where organisations that faced disaster at any moment managed to operate reliably.

Knowledge has also been developed from case studies of disasters and of disasters averted (‘near misses’ and ‘heroic recoveries’) (Reason 2008). Andrew Hopkins’ analysis of factors that contributed to, or ultimately caused, a disaster, such as the explosion at the gas plant in Longford near Melbourne (Hopkins 2000), or the BP Texas City Refinery explosion (Hopkins 2008), contributes to knowledge by extending assessments of step by step causal analysis through to consideration of contextual factors around management failures, such as corporate restructuring and state regulation.

Another strand of insight that has shaped prescriptions for OHS management systems draws from the political traditions of Scandinavia, where co-determination in the context of a relatively powerful working class demonstrate the utilities of participative approaches to OHS management, in contrast to traditions of management-orientated decision-making and control in Anglo countries (Antonsen 2009; Saksvik and Quinlan 2003; Walters 2004).

Case study research has found that the presence of an OHSMS is insufficient to prevent ill-health, injuries and fatalities. Literature around the limitations of OHSMS points to tendencies for a written OHSMS to become the focus of safety efforts, which is erroneous, given that safety arises from a community of practice (Simpson 2002; Lloyd and Roen 2002). Simpson (2002: 178) considered management responses to fatalities in the shunting yards of TranzRail (New Zealand). The response was the addition of pages to the
safety manual. Fatalities continued. This was a poignant example of the limits of bureaucratic controls in complex, hazardous environments, consistent with other case study research.

At the time of the explosion at Esso’s Longford gas plant, Esso was described as having a ‘virtual’ safety system ‘that had taken on a life of its own’ (Hopkins 2005: 3 – 4). It is a situation where management efforts are directed at the formal aspects of organisations, disconnected from daily practice (Antonsen 2009). The safety culture approach to OHS has been part of the research around OHSMS but addresses the informal aspects of organisations. The cultural approach can explain why a system may not be working the way that is expected, by pointing to the gap between formal and informal aspects of work (Antonsen 2009).

**SAFETY CULTURE**

There is a lack of consistency in the explanation and use of culture in the OHS area. Antonsen argues that this is because the idea of culture was imported into OHS from organisation studies without great conceptual reflection (2009: 21). There are two main approaches to safety culture; one where the theorist explores how an organisation’s culture affects safety (Antonsen 2009: Guldenmund 2000), and one where the theorist attempts to define those things that will produce a ‘culture of safety’ (Reason 2008; Hopkins 2005). Antonsen (2009: 24) argues that Hopkins (2005) and Reason (1997) are too simplistic in their focus on prescriptions for a positive safety culture, as those prescriptions for safety would be divorced from broader understandings of organisations. It seems that Antonsen fears that such an approach could
narrow the frame of reference around factors considered and become isolated from the organisation.

Turning to Reason and Hopkins’ prescriptions, the simplest starting point is that a safety culture (a ‘culture of safety’) points to stakeholders valuing safety over other imperatives, such as profitability, productivity, performance-pay or market share, or an individual manager’s quarterly ‘KPIs’. For example, analysis of the Glenbrook and Waterfall fatal train derailments revealed a culture devoted to ‘on-time running’ ahead of safety (Hopkins 2005).

Assumptions are also part of safety culture. Reason’s (1997) study of unsafe acts is cultural in orientation because it concerns assumptions. Reason advocates that OHSMS must be designed from the assumption that humans are fallible. Human errors only result in losses when combined with certain latent conditions. If one presumes that humans are fallible, with cognitive and physical limitations, then OHS management must address the context for human actions, and take a systems approach. ‘Systems thinking’ sees errors as consequences of conditions, rather than primary causes of losses (Reason 1997).

A systems ideology should replace a ‘blame the victim’ ideology, which legitimates a front line worker being ‘named, blamed, shamed and punished’ for errors that lead to losses (Reason 2008: 72 – 73; Quinlan et al. 2010). Reason sees organisational culture as emanating from the ‘strategic apex’ of organisations. Culture, the informal aspect of organisation around norms, beliefs and frames of reference (Antonsen 2009), shapes the formal organisational processes that create the conditions for work: “goal-setting, policy-making,
organising, forecasting, planning, scheduling, managing, financing, allocation resources, communicating, designing and specifying. All of these processes are likely to reflect cultural influences, and each … can contribute to a breakdown in human performance or a defensive failure” (Reason 2008: 100).

Safety culture adherents advocate that a systematic approach to safety management must be complemented by awareness of culture, as culture shapes perceptions and beliefs around safety or danger, possibly creating ‘collective mindfulness’ or ‘collective blindness’ of hazards. (Antonsen 2009: 13 citing Turner and Pidgeon 1997). Reason’s widely cited approach identifies four aspects for an effective safety culture – a learning culture, a just culture, a flexible culture and a reporting culture. These four aspects are necessary for organisations to be risk aware. These cultural attributes were identified from inductive research into ‘high resilience’ organisations (Reason 1997; Hopkins 2005: 12-13).

High resilience or highly reliable organisations are characterised by: ‘collective mindfulness’ that disaster could happen any time; frontline workers are encouraged to speak up; additional data and research is welcome; expertise is valued relative to hierarchy; and managers distrust ‘surface normality’ in favour of experiencing ‘chronic unease’. There is an element of redundancy to allow overlaps in expertise and work and in interactions to increase the likelihood of noticing problems (Antonsen 2009).

A ‘systems’ approach is not about rules and bureaucracy; there is keen appreciation for the dangers of bureaucracy that disempowers individuals from acting on risks (Hopkins
2005). Rather, highly reliable organisations tend to be “rule-based and reliable in times of normal operation and flexible and innovative in times of crisis”, with culture rather than rules providing the coordinating mechanism at such times (Antonsen 2009: 14, citing Weick 1987).

Collective mindfulness is not an aggregation of individuals’ thoughts and values (Antonsen 2009: 21); rather, it is a characteristic of an organisation that shapes the thoughts and values of individual members of the organisation, particularly in terms of enhanced risk awareness (Hopkins 2008: 113 citing Reason 1997). Mindful leaders welcome bad news, use audits to find safety risks rather than to confirm that operations are functioning as expected, are personally involved in safety management, and are sceptical and imaginative (Hopkins 2008: 114 – 120).

The issue of whether culture is practice or behaviour has been addressed by researchers. DeJoy (2005) assessed the relative importance of changing behaviours compared to changing culture. The conclusion was that an integrated approach was required, with behaviour seen to be part of safety culture. Cultural change was argued to be more comprehensive but complex and difficult to verify. It would require fundamental change in an organisation.

The key aspects of safety culture were communication, understandings around safety roles and responsibilities, information, and trust. Whilst DeJoy asserts that cultural change should be a ‘top down’ leadership initiative, influencing and shaping employees’ perceptions and therefore behaviour might be impaired if employees hold a view that management focused more on productivity or
finance ahead of safety. DeJoy therefore emphasises shared perceptions across an organisation.

In summary, themes in the safety culture literature concern communication, training, sub-cultures or ‘silos’, attitudes to risk taking, and employees’ perceptions of management priorities (Ek, Akselsson, Arvidsson and Johnasson 2007; Lawrie, Parker and Hudson 2006; Farrington-Darby, Pickup, and Wilson 2005; Rundmo and Hale 2003).

Case study research shows how such things may come together in practice. Hopkins’ most recent case study concerned the BP Texas City refinery explosion of 2005, where there were 15 fatalities and 170 people injured. Hopkins’ account is titled *Failure to Learn*, emphasising BP’s inability to apply lessons from previous disasters. In explaining the refinery disaster, Hopkins sets forth an explanation of how factors such as cost cutting in the face of insufficient return on investment made at the highest corporate level affected the process safety of the refinery. The refinery was highly profitable but benchmarking showed that it ‘ate’ up more capital relative to return than other refineries (Hopkins 2008: 74). These financial measures drove decisions that were made in isolation from any knowledge of local conditions. Senior leaders were blind to process safety risk.

By contrast, the plant had made significant improvements for personal safety, such as reduction in lost time injuries (Hopkins 2008: 84). BP was unable to make use of lessons from explosions at its other plants, even though Hopkins shows very clearly that the knowledge was available among personnel at Texas City (2008: 72). The process safety
engineer on site had insufficient influence, the CEO did not understand the difference between process safety and personal safety, and recommendations for repairs or improvements were shelved because of insufficient funds: “Texas city had been paralysed by years of cost cutting” (Hopkins 2008: 73).

A key aspect of Hopkins’ analysis is the different levels of activity and experience implicated in the disaster. Structurally, frontline worker actions or omissions cannot ensure process safety (see also Farrington-Darby et al. 2005). Given the lack of effective training and inadequate supervision (from staff cuts deployed as ‘flatter’ structures) (Hopkins 2008: 76), knowledge of risk on the frontline was low. Whilst six frontline workers were blamed and dismissed by BP for procedural violations, Hopkins shows that this action was unjust, in the context of practices where compliance was ‘casual’, indicators and alarms did not work, training was ineffective, supervision was lacking, and engineering controls such as automated shut off valves were not adopted for cost reasons. Isolation of personnel from hazards was neglected, with trailers that housed staff (where most of the fatalities occurred) placed too close to the maintenance operation. Fatigue was also a factor: “At the time of the accident, the day control room operator had been working 12-hour shifts, seven days a week for 29 consecutive days” (Hopkins 2008: 21).

Cost cutting meant there was an inability to act on identified deficiencies. “There were numerous audits and reviews in the years preceding the explosion that identified training shortfalls, maintenance issues and supervisory inadequacies, all of which had a direct bearing on process safety” (Hokins
The senior corporate leaders in London who pursued repeated cost cutting were not required to undertake any risk assessment around their decision-making, which was very unlike the procedures to be followed for the smallest decisions by the frontline workers at the refinery (Hopkins 2008: 82; 105).

The case study also demonstrates the dangers of the risk management approach that has displaced rule compliance. Hopkins advocates that rule compliance is superior for guiding day to day practice, if rules are generated through shared learning, in place of the risk assessment approach that is commonly part of OHSMS where all risk assessments are devolved to “inexpert and task focused” frontline workers (Hopkins 2008: 161).

In 2007, BP was fined US$21.3 million for the Texas City refinery disaster by the Occupational Safety and Health Administrator (OSHA). They also paid US$373 million for criminal charges and liabilities. Again for the Texas City refinery BP was fined a further US$84 million by OSHA in 2009 for inaction on safety and repeated violations at the refinery (Clark 2009). Hopkins (2008) concluded that the causes behind the disaster were depressingly familiar. He reached this conclusion before BP’s latest and most ecologically catastrophic disaster, the Deepwater oil rig explosion and oil spill of April – August 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico.

The investigations at Texas City revealed so many failings that it seems sensible to conclude that BP was criminally negligent. But a surprising finding in Hopkins’ research (2008: 146 – 8) was that BP had espoused that it had been trying to
become a high reliability organisation (HRO) by developing a safety culture.

Hopkins did not frame his analysis around safety culture, as he had concluded that safety culture is a concept prone to misunderstanding. The way that it was misunderstood at Texas City illustrates this very well. The HRO change program was rolled out as an education program, designed to create mindfulness among frontline workers around safety. It was not designed to change organisational practices. There was no investment in improving process safety. The HRO program leaders at BP noted workers’ cynical response to the program, as workers experienced the gap between espoused values and actual values, as management ignored safety critical information. The HRO program was geared to changing the thinking of frontline workers rather than changing the thinking of those with executive decision-making power and control over resources (Hopkins 2008: 148). “[M]indful organisations will be populated by mindful individuals, but the mindfulness of most individuals depends on the mindfulness of the organisation” (Hopkins 2008: 145).

As noted above, our common sense rankles against the notion of an organisation having a mind and this may be why there is a tendency to shift so quickly to seeing safety as the outcome of individuals’ choices and actions.

THE MISUSE OF SAFETY CULTURE
As discussed above, it seemed that safety culture was the answer to the limitations of OHS management systems. However, (2008) chose to avoid using ‘safety culture’ as the framework for explaining the BP Texas City refinery disaster, preferring to emphasise management’s failure to learn.
Hopkins has highlighted a number of instances where safety culture has been misunderstood in OHS management and also implicated in ‘blame the victim’ ideological responses to adverse events. This ideology is not neutral. It legitimates managerial inaction and culpability. It obscures the genesis of risk at work. Apportioning blame to individuals has intuitive appeal as ‘folk psychology’:

People are seen as free agents, capable of choosing between safe and unsafe modes of behaviour. Unsafe acts are thought of as arising mainly from wayward mental processes: forgetfulness, inattention, inadequate knowledge, skills and experience and, on occasions, culpable negligence or even recklessness (Reason 2008: 71 - 72).

Attributing culture with causal power is not just a problem in OHS theory. There is a susceptibility of ‘culture’ being an answer for accounting for differences between countries or organisations rather than being a starting point for further empirical analysis, given that culture is emergent from many relations. As Hopkins notes, the BP Texas City refinery disaster was attributed to a culture of risk blindness. However, he argued that such a culture could only be an intermediate explanation that obscured management failings. In this case... the concept of culture is being used in a way that discourages further attempts to understand why the accident occurred. There is another consequence of stopping the causal analysis once a cultural explanation has been provided.... [O]nce explanation stops, blame takes over. In particular, if we identify a culture of casual compliance as a root cause of the accident, there is a tendency to blame those caught up in that culture. So it was that the
[BP] report quoted concluded that frontline workers should be held accountable and punished (Hopkins 2008: 140).

Hopkins’ analysis is compelling, but the critique of culture can be extended. Hopkins’ view that the blurring of culture as ‘mindset’ and culture as ‘practice’ is just a matter of emphasis (given that mindsets may only be experienced as reflected in behaviour), can be questioned. Spatialising culture (in this instance, distinguishing between individual and collective phenomenon and appreciating that culture is ‘emergent’) strengthens our understanding of the concept’s limitations and strengthens Hopkins’ argument for culture’s susceptibility for ‘blame the victim’. A simpler approach that focuses on the causal role of values, attitudes and assumptions is more useful than working with culture that is mindset or practice/behaviour, or both things at once. This is not to suggest that researching and analysing values, attitudes and assumption is easy. The value of the simplification of shifting from culture to values, attitudes and assumptions is that it brings to the fore questions such as whose values, attitudes and assumptions we’re concerned about, and why. Therefore, it is more appropriate for the typical stakeholder analysis that employment relations disciplinarians bring to problems.

Stakeholder analysis includes assessment of interests and questions of power. Hopkins is acutely aware of the risks associated with hierarchical organisations where frontline workers have little power or voice, and where positional authority is placed ahead of expertise, knowledge and experience: “a culture of empowerment is a precondition for risk-awareness at both the organisational and individual
levels” (Hopkins 2005: 29). He emphasises the importance of management mindsets around safety (Hopkins 2005: 7). Yet, it is possible to deepen to his analytical approach with a more explicit consideration of power within organisations. For example, for the Texas City case, Hopkins notes that transmission of information from the line through the management hierarchy can be problematical due to gaps in status and differences in communication styles between workers and managers: “These interactions are potentially awkward for both parties…” Coaching for managers was suggested as a response (2008: 118).

A different angle on the issue can be drawn from research from Antonsen (2009), who delves more closely into issues of power in workplaces and organisations. This not to just point to unionisation; unionisation on its own is no guarantee of immunity to organisational disaster. Antonsen has researched OHS in the oil and gas industry in Norway, which fits the high reliability category. He gives extensive attention to employee participation structures, advocating a role for unions but emphasising direct rather than participative employee participation.

This emphasis on direct participation comes from Antonsen’s (2009) critical analysis of the performance of work in complex organisations, such as those organisations involved in production of oil and gas, from the platforms to the shipping services around them. His research belied the idea that rules and procedures alone could ensure safety. Rather, consistent with research in other high reliability organisations, local adaptations and improvisations were essential for work performance and for safety. The high reliability research tends to stop at advocating flexibility in operational control in
abnormal circumstances, but Antonsen advocates ongoing employee participation in shaping formal rules and procedures, as this allows mutual learning across the organisation.

Employee participation is the means through which organisations experience the benefits of centralised and decentralised decision-making concurrently, as it closes the gap between planning and doing, with learning on both sides. If workers shape safety rules, they may give up the entrenched view that safety rules and procedures are designed to shield managers from blame. On this point, Antonsen cites Hopkins’ (2000) Lessons from Longford (where Esso blamed an explosion in the Longford gas plant on control room operators) to illustrate how rules that are impossible for workers to comply with can be used to shield managers from blame. If managers give up some centralised control over work it allows learning to “attune the formal structures to the way work is actually carried out”, as it evolves over time (Antonsen 2009: 146 – 147). Having multiple viewpoints heard will enhance a capacity for learning and broaden perspectives around identifying hazards (Antonsen 2009: 150).

CULTURE OR POWER?
There is extensive literature on organisational practices that could be cultivated to promote a culture of safety, but the task is beset by conceptual difficulties, as it must work with culture as practice and culture as values. Culture is values, attitudes and assumptions. But these can only be revealed by practice, encoded in behaviour, language, symbols, artifacts, buildings, policies, rules, hierarchies, and so forth. There is a tendency to skip straight to practices, as these can be codified
and studied. The tendency to define culture as ‘the way we do things around here’ (Hopkins 2005; Weick and Sutcliffe 2007; Guldenmund 2000), which is really the manifestation of culture rather than culture itself, leads to a conception of culture that includes ‘everything’.

Farrington-Darby et al. (2005) did not conceptually distinguish between culture and practice when empirically investigating 100 factors that affect safety culture in rail maintenance (40 were found to be pertinent). Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) devised a safety culture audit tool that has 90 aspects. The International Atomic Energy Agency identified 143 indicators of a safety culture (Antonsen 2009: 19).

Another way that culture risks becoming ‘everything’ is through anthropological approaches, where an organisation is synonymous with culture (Antonsen 2009: 28). If a concept underpinning prescriptions for managing includes ‘everything’, it may be helpful for description, but decidedly unhelpful for causal analysis.

When we attempt to analyse the values, attitudes and assumptions of organisations, consideration must be given as to how these are created and acquired by individuals in the organisations. Gheradhi and Nicolini (2002 in Antonsen 2009: 22) explain that safety culture must be understood around the specific practices for learning about work. This is because safety is about practical knowledge of how to work and how to behave in certain situations. But this is not to say that all practice in organisations is ‘culture’. Antonsen advocates retaining the definition of culture as ‘frames of reference’ (citing Weick 1987 and Turner 1978) but that it should also include practices of social interaction.
As work is differentiated throughout organisations (hierarchically, occupationally, and geographically), knowledge of how to work safely is likely to be differentiated. Thus, it is likely that organisations have ambiguity, fragmentation and differentiation around culture, rather than a consistent, homogenous, stable culture (Antonsen 2009: 22, 25). This highlights the temporal and spatial aspects of culture, and emphasises culture as a process rather than a noun. It emerges from social action, rather than being something that is a given (Antonsen 2009: 24). Culture is necessary for organisations to exist and function and organisations’ existence and functioning produces culture. That is, culture is a duality - both a medium and outcome of social action.

If ‘culture’ is abandoned in favour of a focus on values, attitudes and assumptions, we come to the question of whose values, attitudes and assumptions are relevant. Given that adverse events often arise from individuals’ actions in the workplace, there is a tendency to focus on the thoughts (arising from individually held values, attitudes and assumptions) underpinning the actions of the individual implicated in the event (Reason 2008). It is common sense to then think that improving OHS in the workplace must address what individuals think. It seems that the thoughts of frontline workers involved in adverse events must be more important than, say, the thoughts of managers and company directors who are remote from the workplace. Indeed, to presume that the thoughts of frontline workers are unimportant seems dehumanising and oppressive. However, it would also ignore ways that organisations and other social structures shape the values, attitudes and assumptions of individuals. “Culture is not primarily ‘inside’ people’s heads, but somewhere
‘between’ the heads of a group of people” (Alvesson 2002 in Antonsen 2009: 21). The focus for cultural analysis should therefore be to identify the causal powers of values, attitudes and assumptions held across the organisation, and to understand how they came to be.

Seeing culture as an ongoing process, and one that is connected to interactions associated with particular working practices across organisations, returns the discussion to questions of power. As noted above, there is no reason to expect that culture is ‘shared’ across an organisation. Rather, there has to be some shared mechanism for interacting, which points to some common understandings and language but not necessarily values, attitudes and assumptions. Perrow was an early writer on safety culture, but advocated a power-oriented analysis to safety ahead of a cultural analysis, because such an approach allows exploration of which knowledge is valued, whose views are heard, and those views are suppressed overridden (Perrow 1984 in Antonsen 2009: 47 – 48). Antonsen’s case study research demonstrates how differences in power between managers and workers, but also between groups of workers, has safety implications. He advocates including Lukes’ (1974 in Antonsen 2009: 58 - 59) three-dimensions of power model in research. This includes: rational or positional power (such as control over resources), the power to determine agendas, and the power to shape values and ideologies which produce bias that favour certain groups. The power-oriented approach allows analysis of what might be shared and not shared across an organisation, and issues of conflict and resistance within organisations (Antonsen 2009: 58 – 59).
Power has been considered in safety culture literature, particularly in terms of the relationship between managers and employees, and employee voice. For instance, Hopkins’ (2008) research into the Texas City refinery disaster identifies the risks of worker disempowerment. Also, his research into the Glenbrook and Waterfall rail derailments (Hopkins 2005) considers the disempowerment associated with bureaucracy. But the analysis does not extend to considerations of how workers can be empowered. Given that Hopkins does not put forward an alternative means for altering organisational structures, either through unionisation or co-determination, one is left with the question as to whether the rationality of management alone is to be relied upon; that is, that the many lessons that Hopkins and other researchers identify about the risks of disempowered workers will lead management to make the rational decision to give workers voice and decision-making power. Hopkins (2008) criticised BP’s erroneous understanding of safety culture in its efforts to engender high reliability through attitude modification and training of workers. Antonsen’s (2009: 59) emphasis on power shows these top-down efforts to shape a safety culture to be about enhancing managerial control, enforcing compliance with rules and procedures (with rewards and sanctions), and trying to control workers’ ‘hearts and minds’ instead of just their actions.

Rather than reification of culture, assessing the causal powers of values, attitudes and assumptions can be approached by focusing on interactions. An organisation is a pattern of interactions in a certain place, embedded with and connected to other places. A focus on patterns of interactions provides the means through which different levels of cultural aspects can be considered:
the ‘macro’ aspects, covering the organizations’ ability to detect, correct and learn from mistakes, to the ‘micro’ aspects, relating to the conventions for behaviour, interaction and communication between the members of work communities. These two aspects, while on different levels of analysis and abstraction, are of course highly interrelated (Antonsen 2009: 149).

METHOD FOR RESEARCH SAFETY CULTURE: CRITICAL REALISM
Safety culture research has tended to use standardised questionnaires, surveying workers for their views and experiences of safety – a climate survey. Antonsen (2009) and Hopkins (2008) cite many cases where organisations that seemed to perform well on climate surveys were proved to be fundamentally unsafe (see Guldenmund 2007 for a full evaluation). A climate survey is an approach to research that could only be supported by treating culture as the aggregation of individuals’ values, attitudes and assumptions, as though these were atomised rather than interactive and embedded. Questionnaires administered to individuals cannot capture the dynamic interactions and relations that produce a safety culture and OHS practice. Quantitative research must be underpinned by appreciation of underlying causal mechanisms and theoretical analysis to qualitatively understand the properties of the objects and events being studied. A full understanding of a thing/object particularly in terms of power lies in its connections to other things/objects (Pratt 1994; Sayer 1992).

Antonsen defines the appropriate research question for improving OHS to explain how organisational culture affects safety. The competing approach to safety culture, where features of organisational culture that create a ‘culture of
safety’ are predetermined, leads to an approach of investigating whether particular features are in place in an organisation, either through questionnaires or case studies. Such an approach may mean that a researcher overlooks a significant aspect of an organisation’s culture that affects OHS, because it was not on the predetermined list.

Antonsen advocates ethnography as the most appropriate method for studying culture. Ethnography is about rich description of social interactions and experiences in particular times and places, using multiple sources of data. It provides insights into values, attitudes and assumptions, using inductive inferences from empirical data and deductions using theory (Antonsen 2009: 82 – 84). Particular studies in his book of Norway’s oil and gas industry extend to action research, with cross-organisational comparisons, using ethnographically-inspired methods.

Whilst not disputing the value of ethnographic research for cultural understanding, this paper takes a different view, stepping back to considerations of ontology in order to appreciate the inherently spatial nature of organisations. OHS outcomes are multiply determined and complex, with multiple levels of activity. Culture is emergent. Different kinds of research may be required for different aspects of the factors that shape values, attitudes and assumptions, let alone OHS more broadly. As Antonsen (2009) himself argues, culture concerns the informal aspects of organisations and interactions.

It is not all that needs to be understood in order to improve OHS. Research must extend beyond knowledge that is susceptible to ethnography to the formal structures of
organisations but also to the contexts in which values, attitudes and assumptions are embedded. This is not to revert back to the need to study ‘everything’. Instead, the methodology advocated here is one that focuses on interactions, or relations, as the primary phenomena.

Nevertheless, critical realism does set a daunting challenge. Because the ontology focuses on interactions and relations, it spatialises our appreciation of how things work. This is because, as noted above, something like culture is emergent, rather than a thing just within itself. Massey (1995) represents social life as a mosaic, where a bundle of intersecting relationships forms a ‘tile’ that contributes to the overall pattern whilst maintaining its own distinctiveness (that is, the tile and mosaic are interconstitutive).

The relationships that make up an organisation extend beyond and intertwine with relationships at other scales. ‘Mosaic thinking’ emphasises inter-connections rather than boundaries and facilitates analysis of phenomena that traverses multiple levels of analysis. Boundaries and the notion that a particular level is just a container for social processes must be replaced with seeing social life as practice across interrelated, interconnected and interconstitutive scales. Seeing safety culture as emergent from the interactions within organisations shows the important role that individuals play in creating culture, without then sliding into seeing culture as the property of individuals.

The research method appropriate with such ontology is critical realism. Studying relations can help break through the empirical complexity where culture seems to be ‘everything’. Not everything is related to everything else in the same way.
Some objects/phenomena stand in necessary relation to each other; some stand in only contingent relation; and some relations are of no consequence at all. Research to explain particular concrete phenomena therefore must be empirical in nature, but guided by the careful conceptualisation of the nature of objects/phenomena in order to discover its/their causal properties (Sayer 1992).

Identifying relations of necessity requires careful abstraction from concrete practice (such as a case study), using theory and qualitative understanding of phenomena. Critical realism is a method; not a cook book. Critical realism is explicit that researchers must exercise judgement (drawing from disciplinary knowledge) on the way to creating new knowledge that will eventually be evaluated through “practical adequacy”. Quantitative studies may be used to help identify patterns (extensive methods) which may identify appropriate starting points or interesting questions, but these patterns must then be explained through intensive methods informed by theory, in order to find the step by step mechanics of causality. Patterns of observations alone are insufficient for explanation, as the causal power of a relation may be confounded or obscured by other relations, because the real world of organisations has much going on at any given time or place.

The retroductive method used by critical realists fits well with Hopkins’ (2005) causal chain approach – the ‘but for’ explanations (that identify necessary conditions) to finding root causes for disasters. Critical realists use the term ‘tendency’ to explain an object’s ways of acting and use retroductive reasoning to discover an object’s tendencies (Sayer 1992: 106, 107; Pratt 1994: 54). ‘Events are causally
explained by retroducing and confirming the existence of mechanisms, and in turn the existence of mechanisms is explained by reference to the structure and constitution of the objects which possess them’ (Sayer 1992: 235). Critical realists ask these (transcendental) questions: ‘what must be the case for such and such to happen?’ and ‘what must be the nature of something for such and such to happen?’ (Bhaskar and Lawson 1998).

The ‘realism’ in critical realism may raise the question of whether it is a method appropriate for researching something immaterial like values, attitudes and assumptions. Realism rejects relativism by recognising the opportunities and constraints of the material world. It is accepted that non-social objects may be socially defined but they are not socially produced (Sayer 1992: 26). Nevertheless, things that are used in practical activity are real.

Action and interaction in the world includes working with concept-dependent and intersubjectively-created and understood social phenomena such as language and meanings (Sayer 1992: 31). Consistent with the emphasis on interaction as the key phenomena for studying culture, critical realism sees language and meaning as intersubjective, social and context-dependent rather than individual. Understanding meaning is insufficient on its own: ‘understanding the meaning of an action is rarely sufficient to explain why, how and when and where it is done’ (Sayer 1992: 236).

In comparison to ethnomethodologists, critical realists place relatively more weight on structure. Agency — acting and communicating — presupposes ‘the conditions such as
material resources and social structures, including the conventions, rules and systems of meaning in terms of which reasons are formulated’ (Sayer 1992: 112). But critical realists reject structural determinism, as social structures should not be regarded as immutable or constant because they must be reproduced through (meaningful) action. Whilst ‘certain actions are only possible within particular social structures, the existence of the latter depends upon the continued (contingent) execution of those actions’ (Sayer 1992: 96).

CONCLUSION
Case study research, such as Hopkins’ (2008) analysis of the BP Texas City refinery disaster, provides compelling insights into the myriad factors that shape OHS outcomes. Such accounts create a picture of complexity, where it seems that ‘everything’ shapes OHS. While systems to control processes and people have been found effective to some extent, safety culture has been developed as a concept to ‘give life’ to these systems as part of the daily life of organisations.

Safety culture throws up conceptual challenges. As it is difficult to separate culture from practice, again it seems that ‘everything’ must be accounted for to ensure health and safety at work. More dangerously, the appreciation that culture concerns the values, attitudes and assumptions of people leads to a view that it is the values, attitudes and assumptions of frontline workers that makes up a safety culture. Therefore, adverse events are blamed on frontline workers. This common sense approach to OHS is powerful, because it is counterintuitive to find that organisations have values, attitudes and assumptions, or can be ‘mindful’ or ‘blind’ when it comes to health and safety.
This paper advocated that a more sophisticated, spatialised understanding of culture is required. The ontology underpinning critical realism that leads to particular methodological commitments (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006: 685) is useful for such a purpose. “The social world consists of human agents and social structures. Agents draw on social structure... and in doing so, reproduce and transform those same structures” (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006: 685).

Culture is understood as ‘emergent’ from many relations. Things such as values, attitudes and assumptions are considered to have material effects as they underpin action. They are not considered relative or entirely mutable, nor are they considered ‘objective’. Something like a value or assumption is seen in terms of intersubjectivity, as values and assumptions are produced and reproduced through interaction in context. It brings our attention to interactions in organisations that shape values, attitudes and assumptions, and it is those interactions and relations that give values, attitudes and assumptions causal power.

Whilst ethnography – particularly ethnography that charts the exercise of power as executed by Antonsen (2009) – has proved informative, extending ethnography through using multiple research techniques and theory is necessary to trace how cultural aspects of organisations shape OHS outcomes, bringing the informal and formal aspects of organisations together for a more complete understanding.

Critical realism has the goal of understanding the mechanics of how things work, which includes appreciating causal powers and susceptibilities of things/objects arising from interconnections. Many kinds of extensive and intensive
research techniques and theorising drawn from a range of disciplines may be used to develop qualitative understanding of phenomena, with research moving back and forth between messy, concrete empirical data to abstractions that point to underlying tendencies, that are tested over time for their ‘practical adequacy’ in real world practice.

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Safety Culture: Conceptual considerations and research method


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IS DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PAST ITS ‘USE-BY DATE’ FOR PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGERIAL WOMEN?

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Abstract
The concept of diversity management (DM) emerged in the US context and became a mechanism to facilitate workforce management in a way which would bypass the politically charged issues of affirmative action and equal opportunity. However despite DM initiatives having been in place in Australia for twenty years and progress in anti-discrimination legislation and an ongoing public policy debate, achieving equality at work for women in professional and managerial positions remains problematic. This paper commences with an overview of the development of DM, before moving onto a discussion of the institutional and organisational obstacles that women in professional and managerial positions face, when using flexible work practices as a means of balancing their work and home responsibilities. The paper concludes that DM is yet to deliver equity for professional and managerial women using flexible work practices in Australia and suggests that a new paradigm is needed.

INTRODUCTION
For twenty years the concept of diversity management (DM) in Australia has been applied to initiatives that promote and
celebrate the differences between employees based on the business case arguments for diversity at the workplace. It has been well documented that diversity in organisations should be encouraged because those that promote themselves as ‘inclusive’ organisations can become ‘employers of choice’ (EOWA 2008); effective DM is said to enhance employers’ ability to attract and retain skilled and talented employees (Foster & Harris, 2005) and employers get productivity benefits from more satisfied employees who are able to pursue their careers on the basis of merit irrespective of their age, race or sex (Sinclair 2000b). These popular business case arguments have been used to promote the advantages of flexible working and to support the implementation of flexible work practices, through work-life balance initiatives.

Over the last twenty years there has been significant progress in anti-discrimination legislation and public policy regarding the support of women managing their work and family responsibilities; however despite these advances and the strong business case arguments for DM, there has been a limited progress in moving toward equality at work for women in professional and managerial positions. Flexible work practices are often implemented in an undifferentiated manner that supports a traditional male model of work; a model which advocates women still only succeed at work when they work ‘like men’ (Cockburn, 1991; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008). Why is this the case when currently in Australia women make up 45 per cent (ABS, 2010) of the workforce, 34 per cent of managerial positions (as defined by the ABS) are held by women and DM initiatives have been in place for 20 years?
This paper commences the exploration of whether DM enables women in professional and managerial positions to use flexible work practices and suggests that diversity management is not ‘working’ for this group of women. The paper is part of a larger study evaluating the claims that DM enables women to use flexible work practices in managerial positions as a means of reconciling their work and home responsibilities and investigating whether women seeking to use or using, flexible work practices in managerial positions are able to maintain and pursue their careers.

DM is a well established human resources management (HRM) technique which draws on a large interdisciplinary literature. For managerial women in Australia DM is a key concept, because it has been found (Cornelius & Skinner, 2005) that the culture of organisations and their strategies and policies regarding DM are contributing factors to the experience of this group of women when using or seeking to use flexible work practices for work-life balance reasons. We suggest that while it might be expected that DM would have a positive impact on the ability of managerial women to use flexible work practices, there appears to be little evidence that this effect has been widespread.

Flexible work practices have been defined as including remote working (including working from home), reduced hours (part-time), different hours (flexi-time), annualised hours or ways in which periods of work can be broken up, such as career and employment breaks, job sharing, and family and carers leave (EOWA, 2008; Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997; Tomlinson, 2007). Part-time work has been situated as the most used flexible work practice and as central to achieving work-life balance (Jeffrey-Hill, Martinson,
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Ferris, & Baker, 2004; Pocock 2003; Tomlinson, 2007); consequently this paper considers part-time work as a primary means of providing flexibility.

The first part of the paper provides the context of DM in an overview of the development of DM and of the legislation and public policy that directs DM. The second part highlights the experiences of women using flexible work practices in managerial positions which suggest that whilst DM may enable women to acquire flexibility, DM appears to have had little impact on the pervasiveness of the male breadwinner model. The paper concludes that, despite an increase in the equal opportunity legislation and a continuing public policy focus on DM, entrenched organisational and institutional barriers continue to detract from women achieving equity at the workplace. As a result we question the effectiveness of DM and suggest that it may be time for a new policy paradigm for achieving equity at work for managerial and professional women.

CONTEXT: DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT FOR WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

The limited impact of DM gains salience from the fact that both in Australia and internationally, the composition of the workforce has significantly changed over the last 20 years as a result of the increasing workforce participation of women (Birch, 2005), including women with young children (Charlesworth & Chalmers, 2005). Women play a substantial role in the paid economy, andhome and paid work are no longer independent of each other (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008; Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006). In Australia, the number
of women working in managerial positions has increased to 34 percent (ABS, 2009) and the proportion of women using the most common flexible work practice (part-time) is now 46 percent (ABS, 2010). Women dominate part-time employment, accounting for 70 per cent of the part-time workforce (ABS, 2010).

Recent literature demonstrates that in most advanced industrialised societies family responsibilities still create unique challenges for women who want to pursue a career (Castleman, Coulthard, & Reed, 2005; Metz, 2005). In Australia, successfully balancing paid work with caring responsibilities remains a major challenge (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008), despite most dual income families managing the problem of balancing paid work and care for children and the home by ‘agreeing’ that the female should use flexible work practices (Pocock 2003). The outcome has been an increase in the number of women working part-time in managerial positions - currently, 34 per cent of the Australian workforce consists of women in managerial positions and the number of women working part-time in these positions is 23 per cent (ABS, 2009). The impact of these demographic and societal changes in the workforce over the last 20 years (Saltzstein, Ting, Saltzstein, & 2001; Teicher & Spearitt, 1996) has meant that DM has become a critical issue for employers (Hall & Richter, 1988; Kossek, Noe, & Demarr, 1999).

The next part of this paper provides an overview of the development of DM, including the legislation and public policy surrounding DM and we raise some questions regarding why DM may be past it’s ‘use-by’ date for managerial women seeking flexibility at work.
DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
The term ‘diversity management’ can be traced back to 1987 when the US based Hudson Institute published its WorkForce 2000 report (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000, p. 20). The report recognised that in order for the workforce to fulfil its potential by the year 2000, America needed to address a number of challenges. These included stimulating a more flexible workforce, providing for the needs of working families with children and bringing minority workers into the workforce, premised on the prediction that most new entrants to the American labour force between the years 1985-2000 would be non-white, female or immigrants (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

Before the late 1980s affirmative action programs and equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies had promoted equality of opportunity in the workplace, however affirmative action was often given a negative connotation in America, because, like Australia, affirmative action for women was seen as operating against the principles of merit (Sinclair, 2000). Consequently the shift to ‘diversity’ was seen as attractive for three reasons: firstly, as a way of moving beyond the narrower terms of affirmative action and EEO because it could cover everyone in the workforce – women, men, of all ages and all races (Lorbiecki & Jack 2000); secondly, because ‘managing diversity’ was seen to be more gender neutral and popular (because it was a more encompassing term); and thirdly because the business case argument for diversity programs drove the need to implement diversity initiatives rather than the moral emphasis that permeated affirmative action and equality programs (Liff & Cameron, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Sinclair 2000b). Consequently the shift to DM became a human
resource management technique (Kramar, 1998), which relied on the policies and procedures organisations had in place to recognise and manage the diversity of their workforce (Strachan, French, & Burgess, 2010). However, the shift from the regulatory approach of AA and EEO to DM is seen by critics as ‘too soft’ and maybe ‘too soon’, rendering DM an ineffective tool.

Critics of DM (see Humphries & Grice 1995; Bacchi 2000; Sinclair 2000a; Sinclair 2000b; Wrench 2005) have argued that DM is ‘a cover up’, ‘window dressing’, a ‘softer term’ which detracts from the real equality agenda (Wrench 2005), because DM relies on voluntarism (rather than the regulatory approach of AA and EEO) (Bacchi, 2000, p. 64). One of the early advocates of DM (Thomas Jr, 1990) argued that women and minorities no longer needed a ‘boarding pass’, they needed an ‘upgrade’. In other words the problem of minorities had shifted from achieving entry level positions in work to making better use of their potential at all levels – particularly middle management and leadership positions. Thomas Jr (1990, p. 114) argued that the objective of DM was not to assimilate minorities and women into a dominant white male culture but to create a dominant heterogeneous culture. However Sinclair (2000a) argues that DM encourages a focus on the ‘other’, a focus on those who are deemed different within the dominant regime. In other words DM should create a culture that recognises and accepts diversity but in practice it may focus attention on those who are different and deviate from the norm. By extension, women seeking to use flexibility in managerial positions would be seen to be different to the majority of managers who work full time – does this render DM an ineffective tool for women seeking to use flexibility in managerial positions?
In addition to DM potentially drawing attention to those who deviate from the norm, we ask whether the shift to DM was too soon? Thomas Jr (1990, p. 117) argued:

*The ability to manage diversity is the ability to manage your company without unnatural advantage or disadvantage for any member of your diverse work force. The fact remains that you must first have a work force that is diverse at every level, and if you don’t, you’re going to need affirmative action to get you there.*

In other words, DM does not have the ‘strength’ to create organisational change – a ‘harder’ regulatory approach is required to achieve change. Recently, Elizabeth Broderick, the Sex Discrimination and Age Discrimination Commissioner in the Australian Human Rights Commission, highlighted the decline in the number of women holding executive positions in ASX200 companies over the last four years (Broderick, 2010) and the ASX Corporate Governance Council’s draft reforms requiring organisations to set and report against measurable objectives for women’s progression to executive positions. Broderick (2010) considered the draft reforms in the broader international context, in which Australia is ranked number 50 on women’s workforce participation (a decrease of 10 countries in one year) and the ‘softer’ approach which has been taken by Australia compared to the use of quotas for board membership in Spain, France, Norway, Switzerland and Israel – highlighting the need to put stronger regulatory approaches in place for women to achieve equality at work. These experiences point to the need for more ‘hard’ regulation in managing diversity and raise the question whether DM initiatives have been implemented before
organisations have achieved diversity ‘at every level’ - which would enable DM to work effectively.

Despite these concerns, over the last 20 years DM policies have been introduced into a wide range of private and public sector organisations in Australia and other developed economies (Strachan, Burgess, Henderson, & 2007). The rationales for DM have included providing a means of increasing and maintaining the participation rates of women and ethnic minorities (Johnston & Packer 1987; Lorbiecki & Jack 2000) and as a risk management strategy to minimise potential claims of discrimination (Gaze, 2005). The subsequent support and implementation of DM policies have rested on the business case arguments (inclusive organisations become ‘employers of choice’, attraction and retention of skilled and talented employees and the productivity benefits of contented employees). The next section of the paper outlines the legislation and policy that surrounds DM.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY DIRECTING DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
In Australia, DM is underpinned by legislation (at the federal levels, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984(Cth) and Racial Discrimination Act 1975(Cth), Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Act 1986 (Cth), Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace 1999(Cth) and the significance of DM to governments is reflected in the proliferation of federal and state government policies and commissioned reports. For example the federal Government released a Work and Family Issues Paper in September 2006, the Victorian Government introduced the Work and Family Balance Manual in March 2007, the Centre for Work and Life
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reported on work-life outcomes in the Australian Work and Life Index 2007, the comprehensive report, *Work Life Balance in Australia in the New Millennium: Rhetoric versus Reality* was released by Duxbury and Higgins (2008) and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission released the *Listening Tour Community Report* in 2008. In addition to these reports, the federal industrial *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (Cth) contained provisions “designed to help prevent and eliminate discrimination...to encourage the spread of flexible working arrangements” (Davis & Pratt, 1999, p. 84). More recently the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) (building on the objectives of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (Cth)) was introduced with an objective to assist employees to balance their work and family responsibilities by providing for flexible working arrangements (3(d)). However managerial women most commonly fall outside the provisions of awards and agreements - they tend to have common law contracts and consequently rely on the policy and procedures of their employers when seeking to use flexible work practices. In other words, this group of women relies on the successful implementation and achievement of policy aims at an organisational level.

The question of how best to implement and achieve policy aims without undermining organisational competitiveness has been discussed in the context of ‘better regulation principles’ which have promoted a move away from the ‘command and control’ or ‘hard’ forms of legislation and regulation which have been seen as too prescriptive and inflexible (McLaughlin & Deakin, 2010; Wrench 2005). Instead, ‘light touch’ regulation, self-regulation, the encouragement of firms to go ‘beyond compliance’, to be ‘employers of choice ‘and to ‘do the right thing’ in order to improve organisational
competitiveness have been the preferred options in a more deregulatory economic environment (McLaughlin & Deakin, 2010). However despite significant regulation and the interest in work-life balance, work and family and flexibility at federal and state and social policy levels, the approach appears to have had little impact on the ability of women to use flexible work practices in managerial positions at an organisational level. Is this because the ‘soft’ approach to DM for managerial women is flawed by a failure to address the deeply regulation entrenched and pervasive barriers to its effective implementation?

As outlined above it can be seen that DM has progressed to be a significant and intractable issue for employers and policy makers. In the circumstances, it would be reasonable to anticipate that qualified women seeking to use flexible work practices in managerial positions would be able to access these positions easily and maintain their careers with equal ease. This prompts us to ask ‘Why does there appear to be such strong interest and support for DM but the ability to access and use flexible work practices in managerial positions appears problematic?’ The next part of the paper highlights the experience of women in managerial positions using flexible work practices.

THE EXPERIENCES OF MANAGERIAL WOMEN USING FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES

Work/ Life Balance
Flexibility is concerned with enabling males or females with family responsibilities to engage equally in the paid workplace (Sheridan & Conway, 2001). Work-life balance can be described as the desire to achieve and the achievement of, satisfying experiences in all life domains (Kirchmeyer, 2000, p.
which has been shown to be positively related to quality of life and is most commonly sought as a means of reconciling work and family responsibilities (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). Whilst work-life balance may be sought for a broad range of caring and personal interest reasons, the focus of this paper is on the use of flexible work practices by managerial women as a means of balancing work and home responsibilities.

The concept of work-life balance arose as a result of the increased participation of women in the workplace, because there was heightened attention on the need for workplace policies to assist employees in balancing work and family life (Burke, 2000; Elloy & Smith, 2003). More recently work-life balance literature has recognised the debates surrounding how to manage time, particularly the allocation of time for work and time for caring for family (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005); the impact of the intensification of work on work-life balance (Pocock, 2003, 2006); and the rhetoric and reality of work-life balance initiatives (Houston & Waumsley, 2003; Pocock, Skinner, & Williams, 2007).

Whilst the concept of work-life balance is well established, there are still significant issues surrounding the achievement of work-life balance, which tend to have greater impact on women than men (Bardoel 2005; Houston & Waumsley 2003; Edwards & Wajcman 2005). The work-life balance of women managers (who are mothers) has been considered by Wajcman (1999) and Bardoel (2005) who identified taking work home and experiencing a high level of conflict and constant tension between the demands of work and home as being features of women working in managerial positions.
Women using flexible work practices in managerial positions often choose to do so as a means of reconciling their work and family life needs and responsibilities. Flexible work practices include remote working (including working from home), reduced hours (part-time), different hours (flexi-time), annualised hours or ways in which periods of work can be broken up, such as career and employment breaks (Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997; Tomlinson, 2007). Some women see this choice as a long-term option, while others have shorter-term goals in mind, such as a strategy to preserve their workforce status until their children start school. However, whilst working flexibly in managerial positions allows women the opportunity to be at home more, their quality of life can actually decrease. Research has shown that many women who request flexibility are granted their request and paid a reduced salary, only to find their workload stays the same (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 1999; Shellenbarger, 2002). Similarly, Sandford (2001) has argued that women working part-time in these positions habitually exceeded their newly reduced hours in order to fulfil the demands of their positions.

Long hours and a large workload can be emotionally and physically draining and have the potential to negate the reason for choosing flexible work options. In addition, more recent research conducted by Rubery, Ward and Grimshaw (2005) suggests that in an increasingly globally competitive market many employers may find their customers’ needs are competing with their employees’ attempts to reconcile work and home responsibilities.
Career development
Promotion is a theoretical possibility within many organisations for women using flexible work practices in managerial positions. However, there has been limited evidence of upwards mobility (Corwin, Lawrence, Frost, & Peter, 2002; Skinner, 1999). Research conducted in the 1990s by Traves, Brockbank and Tomlinson (1997) and more recently by Corwin et al (2002) has highlighted that the majority of women, who work flexibly feel that they have stepped off the career ladder; for example Traves et al (1997, p. 148) wrote that ‘There is no career progression as a part-time member of management’. Others have noted that women’s career opportunities become significantly limited when they work flexible hours (Lane, 2004). In addition, few companies were found to have policies covering flexible work practices, including rules on the possibility of promotion (Edwards & Robinson 2001).

The perception of most managers has been that senior positions require a full-time commitment to provide continuity and to fulfil the responsibilities of the position (Traves et al 1997). There is an underlying sense of visible time spent in the job (Chalmers, Campbell, & Charlesworth, 2005) and a belief that it would be difficult for a part-time employee to gain the breadth of experience necessary to hold a senior position (Skinner 1999). Behind this perception has been the observation that most women working flexibly in managerial positions regularly take work home with them without adequate recognition of the amount of work that is done in the employee’s own time and without pay (Skinner 1999).
In addition, part-time status in managerial positions can evoke attitudes from colleagues and clients which have ramifications for advancement. Epstein et al (1999) found that there was a high degree of ambivalence towards part-time attorneys. Commonly asked questions were:

- Do they deserve the status?
- Can their commitment be trusted?
- Is promotion of part-timers fair to full timers?

The tendency to marginalise women managers working flexibly, combined with fewer training and development opportunities, has reduced the potential for them to gain the range of experience and skills necessary to compete effectively for promotion. Good performance in an employee’s current role is generally considered to be a key element in being considered for promotion. However, there appears to be little guidance available for line managers about how to measure the performance of a manager using flexible work practices against her full-time peer group. Research suggests that in the past, few organisations addressed issues such as how part-time employees might get back on their career track, for example, by returning to work full-time for a certain period of time (Epstein et al 1999).

Later research (Edwards & Robinson 2001; Wise & Bond 2003) shows that, in addition to a lack of policies covering flexible work practices, line managers responsible for implementing organisations’ flexible work policies have often been inadequately informed of existing policies and how they might be applied. This issue of communication reflects the gap that often exists between the rhetoric and good intention which often accompany workplace policies on equity for women and the practical implementation of those policies.
Training
A common finding in the literature has been that employers are reluctant to provide training to women managers using flexible work practices. Research conducted by Skinner (1999), found that it was difficult to arrange training for part-time employees because of a perception that they would hardly work at all, if they attended training programs. Later research by Edwards and Robinson (2001) highlighted the belief amongst some employers that part-time managers yield a poor return on investments in training because they have fewer opportunities to use the new skills acquired. Their research found that regular formal training is a requirement for nursing and the police professions, and that part-time employees are equally entitled to access this training. However whilst part-time officers were able to complete the basic training requisite for professional competence, at the time of reporting none had succeeded in applying for elite training courses and no part-time officer had gained a place where there was direct competition with a full-time colleague (Edwards & Robinson 2001).

In 1999, Skinner found that part-time nurses were expected to attend training in their own time, in comparison to full-time nurses who usually attended during their working hours. Subsequently, Harley and Whitehouse (2001) and Chalmers et al (2005) have found that, in addition to the opportunity for training often dwindling to nothing or only being offered during unpaid hours, training opportunities are often reduced when hours are reduced. Yet despite the lack of opportunity for training development, career progression still often rests on training (Chalmers et al 2005).
Commitment

The shorter hours worked by managerial women using flexible work practices identify them as being ‘time deviants’ who are less committed and less hardworking than their full-time colleagues (Epstein et al 1999). The idea that part-timers are ‘time deviants’ has also been considered by Corwin et al (2002) and Lane (2004) who argue that part-time employees lack respect at work because of their assumed lack of commitment to work. Time in the workplace is regarded as indicative of productivity and commitment (Edwards & Robinson, 2001; Traves, et al., 1997), which is evident in high potential manager criteria in many companies in which commitment to work, career and company is the top criterion (Liff & Ward, 2001).

The perception of (mainly male) managers has been that senior positions require a full time commitment to provide continuity and fulfil the responsibilities entailed. It has been shown that there is a belief that it would be difficult for a part-timer to gain the breadth of experience necessary to hold a senior position (Skinner 1999). Time in the workplace has been regarded as indicative of productivity and commitment; those who work shorter weekly hours risk having their dedication to the job questioned (Edwards & Robinson 2001), and even mentioning the idea of reducing hours might lead to women being excluded from being considered as serious candidates for promotion (Liff & Ward 2001). It has been argued that these criticisms stem from an underlying belief that women are less motivated and less committed towards their work and career than men (Cortis & Cassar, 2005; Liff & Ward, 2001), which in turn influences the career opportunities offered to women (Traves et al 1997; Skinner 1999). It appears that while the idea of a ‘career
comes first’ mentality is outdated, the culture of many organisations still supports the notion. Commitment is probably the key to women not being able to pursue their careers while using flexible work practices; this attitude is a key organisational barrier that needs to be overcome.

**Job Marginalisation**
Women working in managerial roles and using flexible work as a means of balancing their work and home responsibilities have often found their roles are marginalised in comparison to their full-time colleagues (Skinner 1999; Epstein et al 1997; Edwards and Robinson 2001). For instance, Epstein et al (1997) found that part-time attorneys experienced decreased opportunities to work on high profile matters, take the lead on cases, and network with colleagues. Similarly, the line managers interviewed by Skinner (1999) believed that it was operationally impractical for part-time employees to undertake certain duties which the line managers perceived as requiring full-time attendance, for example, management of employees. In addition, part-time police officers and nurses interviewed by Edwards and Robinson in 2001 had experienced restrictions on the range of tasks they performed; they were not, for example, expected to mentor new employees. In a more recent study Johnson (2004) argues that one of the key issues with flexible working is how employers manage employees who are not always present; and in managerial roles there appears to be no straightforward mechanism for covering the duties of managers when they are not working. Such attitudes are quite remarkable in view of advances in information and telecommunication technology, which allow people in certain occupations to work almost anywhere and at any time.
Work Colleagues

Broadbridge (1996), Epstein et al (1997) and Bardoel (2005) found that many colleagues communicated disapproval of their professional female colleagues’ flexible working through snide comments, sarcasm, slights and non-verbal behaviour. This included examples such as colleagues deliberately not remembering the days that the part-time colleague works and being made to feel isolated from the core work group. Wiscombe (2002) found that it was not unusual for work colleagues to express their beliefs that mothers should not work because they could not see how they could do either job (home or work) well. It has been common for women using flexible practices in managerial positions to feel a lack of respect or feel resented by their work colleagues, in addition to receiving jibes from their full-time colleagues in regard to their perceived lack of commitment and about their privileges, such as leaving early (Bardoel, 2005; Corwin, et al., 2002).

Disapproval of flexible work practices appears to be a feature of employment in the managerial labour market and not a feature of the non-professional labour market. This in part may be able to be explained by employees perceiving family friendly policies, to be inherently inequitable because they exclude non-parents and due to the increased workload on colleagues when parents take advantage of conditions provided by these policies (Wise & Bond, 2003). It is also likely to be a symptom of a full-time workforce expected to put in more hours than in the past as working hours and work intensification in most industrial nations has increased significantly over the past 20 years (Bardoel, 2005; Buchanan & Van Wanrooy, 2001; Burke, 2000; Campbell & Chalmers, 2008).
This section of the paper has canvassed the experiences of women using flexible work practices in managerial positions. Whilst more women are able to utilise flexible work practices in managerial positions, the problems facing women balancing their family lives with their careers as managers continues to be problematic. Managerial women’s experiences of flexible working would indicate that firstly, utilising flexible work practices impacts on the ability to gain advancement and secondly, that the male model of work still pervades.

CONCLUSION
This paper addresses a neglected issue in the field of equal employment opportunity, the implications of DM for managerial women using flexible work practices, particularly those who have sought to work part-time as a means of balancing their work and home responsibilities. This is a group who possibly face even greater barriers than other working women by virtue of the fact that their ‘flexible working’ status impacts on the opportunities that they have to pursue and maintain their careers. The primary barriers that this group of women need to overcome include being able to progress and develop their careers despite their having utilised flexible work practices which were installed in part for the purposes of achieving gender equity in the workplace.

On the available, mostly international evidence, it appears that women are deemed to have ‘stepped off the career ladder’ when using flexible work practices so that while promotion is a possibility, this is fairly remote due to prevailing attitudes among managers and co-workers. Furthermore this group of women are seen as being less
committed to work and are less able to access training opportunities - both of which impact on their ability to progress their careers. It appears that the dominant model of working life in Australian society is male: women still only succeed at work when they work ‘like men’ (Cockburn, 1991). So while DM policies are widely adopted by organisations, the continued dominance of the male model of work and working life is a powerful barrier to advancing equity at work.

Notwithstanding the legislation and public policy framework surrounding DM in Australia we suggest that after two decades of initiatives, DM is yet to deliver equity for managerial women using flexible work practices. Drawing on Australian and international evidence it is clear that there are a series of attitudes which impede the career prospects of this group; these include: perceptions that part-time employment denotes a lesser commitment to the job and the denial of access to training opportunities because of the dearth of available working hours. To the extent that this is true we conclude that for managerial and professional women DM may be past its ‘use-by date’ and a new paradigm may be needed to achieve greater equity for women.

To develop a new paradigm and achieve greater equity for women we suggest that future debates and research into flexibility for managerial women should focus on three key areas. First, there needs to be careful investigation of whether the reported negative attitudes of employers and co-workers are related to the increasing pressures of competition faced by organisations and the associated pressures to keep costs down or whether those attitudes are a seemingly more defensible way to express discriminatory attitudes in the workplace. Second, and relatedly, this
research should consider whether in a competitive environment the attraction and retention of talent is a key motivating factor for employers to provide work-life flexibility for managerial women. Third, the extent to which organisational strategies enable women in managerial positions to use flexible work practices and whether flexible work practices provide an effective option for women seeking to pursue their careers.

A comprehensive consideration of these issues is essential to determining the adequacy of the existing public policy framework surrounding diversity management and the desirable directions for future developments. In particular such research can elucidate whether the dominant voluntarist and market driven approaches to this area of regulation are sufficient to change those attitudes which fly in the face of the business case arguments on which DM is founded.

Finally, it may seem remarkable to call for more research on the impact of diversity management, however, as this paper indicates, the available literature on the efficacy of DM and the trajectories for effective reforms is quite limited, and in the case of professional and managerial women, this is even more strongly the case.

REFERENCES


Is Diversity Management Past Its ‘Use-By Date’ for Professional and Managerial Women?


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ABSTRACT
Immigration policy in Australia consists of skilled, humanitarian and family reunion based intakes. In recent years the main policy focus has been on skilled migrants, who are critical to filling gaps in the labour market. However, there is little research on what happens to migrants and their families after arrival. This article focuses on the job seeking experiences of skilled migrant couples, including those who have children. It reports on exploratory research with 12 skilled migrants from Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) countries. The key findings show that barriers such as language and lack of local work experience persist, and that skilled dual-career migrant couples have to make a range of difficult choices as they seek employment. Therefore the additive effect of the various barriers and the complexities of negotiating them as a couple further impede migrants’ successful engagement with the labour market.

INTRODUCTION
Historically, Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) migrants have been more likely to occupy jobs in low-paid sectors of the workforce in industries such as textiles and
clothing, labouring, cleaning, and services (Alcorso & Ho 2006; Dyer, McDowell & Batnitzky 2009), and therefore most research on migrant workers has focused on their status as vulnerable workers in low-paid occupations (Alcorso 1991; Datta, McIlwaine, Evans, Herbert, May & Wills 2007; Holgate 2005; Renzulli, Grant & Kathuria 2006; Wright 2007; Zuberi 2007). Since the mid-1990s, however, there has been an increasing emphasis on skilled migration programs, which would be expected to lead to improved employment outcomes for migrants with technical or tertiary training (Hawthorne 2005). However, research has shown that skilled migrants are not necessarily able to transfer their experience and skills easily into the Australian labour market (Ho 2006). Many face issues of language, skills recognition and lack of local job experience, and continue to experience poor employment outcomes (Fang, Novicevic & Zikic 2009; Ho & Alcorso 2004).

Whilst we know that obtaining employment is difficult for both female and male skilled migrants, research has not yet explored the employment seeking activities undertaken by migrants who arrive as part of a couple or family. Focusing on migrant couples highlights the complex negotiations that take place between family members as they search for employment in their new home. This article explores the experiences of 12 migrants regarding their own and their partner’s experience of seeking work. The analysis focuses on how the interviewees undertake the job seeking process, their spouse’s experience, the interaction with family functioning, and how the joint job seeking process impacts upon each partner’s ability to find employment in their chosen profession. The problem for skilled migrants is that they face persistent barriers to accessing the labour market
complicated for migrant couples by negotiations around prioritising the job seeking and training needs of the two individuals.

AUSTRALIA’S SKILLED MIGRATION PROGRAM

Australia has an extremely diverse workforce. Recent figures show that 26 per cent of all employees in the Australian labour force were born overseas, with more than half of this group – 15 per cent of the Australian workforce – coming from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (ABS 2008, p. 18). Government policy initiatives have encouraged skilled migrants through the introduction of Australia’s Skilled Migration Program.\(^1\) Introduced in the mid-1990s, this program has attracted increasing numbers of skilled migrants to fill recognised skill shortages in the national labour market (Connell & Burgess 2009; Productivity Commission 2007). As a result, migrants from Mainly English Speaking Backgrounds (MESB) and NESB countries are now more likely than native-born workers to hold tertiary level qualifications and much higher skill levels (Castles, Foster, Iredale, & Withers 1998).

Some commentators argue that the emphasis on skilled migrants has been beneficial economically, as it has led to a decrease in migrant unemployment (Hawthorne 2005). However, there has also been debate concerning the broader labour outcomes for migrant workers. Researchers have questioned whether migrants are in fact achieving better labour market outcomes; that is, obtaining employment equivalent to their skill and education levels (Cobb-Clark, Connolly & Worswick 2001; Hawthorne 2002, 2005; Ho & Alcorso 2004).
The barriers faced by NESB migrants have been well documented. The main difficulties centre on language fluency and the transfer of educational achievements (Birrell & Rapson 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). Lack of local work experience is also problematic (Alcorso & Ho 2006; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). As a result, many migrants face a ‘devaluing of skills’ as they seek to gain employment in the local labour market (see McGregor 2007 in Raghuram 2008, p. 45).

GENDER AND THE MIGRANT WORKER
While both women and men must often accept work in lower-skilled jobs unrelated to their profession (Raghuram 2008), women appear to face particular difficulties in finding appropriate work, suggesting that gender plays a large role in determining workforce access and employment outcomes for migrants. In part this is because, historically, skill based migration programs were developed from the perspective of ‘the migrant as male’, a gendered view embedded within the assumption that the male migrant is the primary worker/breadwinner (Cobb-Clark et al 2001, p. 13). This is not only true for Australia; the globally significant phenomenon of ‘high-skilled international migration’ has continued to exhibit a ‘male gender bias’ (Liversage 2009, p. 121). Because of this policy focus, much of the research has also examined the migrant experience from the male standpoint (Cobb-Clark et al 2001; Datta et al 2007; Hawthorne 2005; Kofman & Raghuram 2005; Liversage 2009).

One aspect of the gendering of the migrant labour experience is that women in all visa categories have lower labour market participation rates than migrant men (Cobb-Clark 2000). Some of the reasons for this are clear: for example, the
division of labour within households has traditionally been weighted towards the male as breadwinner, based upon gendered family roles configured to fit the context of industrialised societies (Beauregard, Ozbilgin & Bell 2009; Pocock 2003). In addition, women face more barriers than do men, including lack of spousal support and lack of access to appropriate childcare and other support systems. Women migrants also feel keenly the loss of established networks of family and friends (Boyle, Feng & Gayle 2009; Cooke 2007).

Both sexes may experience ‘downward occupational mobility’ if their acquired skills, qualifications and knowledge are under-utilised or not fully recognised in the labour market (Ho 2006; Ho & Alcorso 2004), which may in turn lead to loss of identity, which can negatively affect personal health and overall well-being (Boyle et al 2009; Cooke 2007; Liversage 2009). Of course, men may also experience these psychosocial effects. However, these problems are further intensified for migrant women and may become exacerbated over time, particularly if their roles shift towards being more domestically focused if they cannot find suitable employment, and have reduced social and family support networks (Alcorso & Ho 2006; Ho & Alcorso 2004; Ho 2006).

Furthermore, gender discrimination still persists in the Australian workplace, despite several decades of anti-discrimination legislation. This particularly affects women in male-dominated occupations, such as engineering, certain scientific professions and senior management (Roberts & Ayre 2002; Watson 2009), which are occupations held by some skilled migrant women. Hence migrant women may face obstacles that are in some cases different to those of men as well as additional barriers due to spousal, societal and
cultural expectations of a woman’s role (Cooke 2007; McKinnish 2008). Lack of practical support in areas like childcare, and discrimination on account of both gender and race also present as difficulties.

DUAL-CAREER MIGRANT COUPLES
The skilled migrating couple is a little explored variant of the social phenomenon of the dual-career couple. More generally, the participation of more women in the labour market has led to research on the negotiation and decision-making processes of couples, including decisions about whether both will pursue their careers at the same time or whether one person’s career should take precedence over the other (Cooke 2007; Taylor 2007). A good deal of research has examined the ways that families in general ‘juggle’ or ‘balance’ work and family issues (Charlesworth, Campbell, Probert, Allan & Morgan 2002; Greenhaus & Parasuraman 1997; Morehead 2001; Pocock, 2003; 2005).

Migrant couples may make decisions as to which partner will seek entry into the workforce ahead of the other, with the remaining partner perhaps undertaking employment in a low-paid occupation just to get by and to provide for their family (Iredale 2005). In addition, culturally-specific gender norms may play a major role in the decision making process of migrant couples, with women putting family responsibilities ahead of their career (Cooke 2007; Iredale 2005; Liversage 2009; McKinnish 2008; Raghuram 2008).

So there is a research gap that needs to be filled regarding the work-family issues for migrating families (Cobb-Clark et al 2001), examining such as matters as the complex intra-family
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negotiations about adjustment to balancing work and family in a new country.

INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER AND RACE: ISSUES FOR SKILLED MIGRANT COUPLES

The neglect of the experiences of migrant women and couples in the literature has arisen partly because research on disadvantage at work generally focuses upon one or another of the categories of gender, race, ethnicity and class, with little research carried out on the intersections between them (Acker 2006). Studies of women’s inequality have rarely disaggregated data by race, thus privileging white women’s experiences (Browne & Misra 2003) although workplace segregation by race is common (Acker 2006; Walby 1990).

Empirical research has highlighted the interacting effects of different forms of disadvantage; Sawer has labelled the migrant woman’s experience in Australia as a ‘double disadvantage’ with respect to gender, ethnic, and racial disadvantage (Sawer 1990, p. 107). To counter the trend in the literature to ignore multiple disadvantage, intersectionality theory attempts to analyse the ‘interconnections and interdependence of race with other categories’ (Adib & Guerrier 2003; Benschop 2006), acknowledging that identity is not uni-dimensional, and that gender can also be shaped by other characteristics, including class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and age (Holgate, Hebson & McBride 2006).

Another body of literature highlights the fact that organisations are gendered and scholars in this area continue to highlight the problems of the ‘male advantage’ (Acker 2006, p. 458; Acker 2005, pp. 450-52; Eveline 1994). In short,
the intersection of both race/ethnicity and gender affects the employment outcomes of migrant women. The research reported in this article focuses the intersectionality lens more sharply to incorporate the complex issues that migrants as couples and often, parents, face in settling in Australia.

METHOD AND DATA
This article forms part of a larger longitudinal research project focusing on the job search and employment experiences, expectations and outcomes for skilled NESB migrants, both women and men. Qualitative research techniques were chosen for this project as they allow for the exploration of everyday life (Fontana & Frey 2003). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in two phases at 12-month intervals to enable them to share their lives and events through telling their own stories (Bryman 2004).

Twelve semi-structured interviews undertaken with skilled NESB migrants from phase one of the research project are analysed in this article. Nine participants were clients sourced from one large Queensland Government department. These participants were identified from within a departmental database and recruited via letter. A further three participants were sourced from a local government department, where the participants were undertaking an in-house training and work development program specifically designed for skilled migrants. Seven of the participants were female and five were male. Pseudonyms have been used in this article.

Participants arrived in Australia under varied visa arrangements. Most interviewees held at least a Bachelor degree, and most had lengthy work experience. Semi-structured interviews of between 45 minutes to one hour
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were conducted, and interview transcripts were analysed using grounded theory using sensitising concepts drawn from the literature (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

THE PERSISTENCE OF BARRIERS: LANGUAGE, LOCAL EXPERIENCE, AND SKILL RECOGNITION
This study confirms that the often-described barriers to employment persist for skilled migrants, supporting previous research that demonstrates that language proficiency and lack of local work experience is problematic for migrants (Alcorso & Ho 2006; Birrell & Rapson 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). Furthermore, the research confirmed that skill and qualification recognition, another widely known barrier (Dyer et al 2009), was also an issue.

Many participants reported that English language proficiency was one of the main obstacles to gaining employment. George, an engineer from Albania, felt that he was disadvantaged because he was not a ‘native English speaker’. Hayat, a qualified civil engineer from Iraq, had arrived in Brisbane 11 months before the interview with her husband Zameer and two young children. Zameer is a qualified English teacher with three years’ experience and has been successful in gaining teacher registration in Queensland, but has been unsuccessful in finding employment. Hayat said that ‘He [my husband] tried to find a job as assistant, teacher’s assistant but nobody accept him’ adding that she believed this was because of Zameer’s lack of language proficiency.

Many participants highlighted the difficulties of gaining local work experience. Debbie is a trained accountant from China with nine years’ work experience. She said that she had applied for up to 30 jobs in the accounting profession and was
disappointed that she had not been called for one interview. She said that she was certain that lack of local work experience was the reason. Similarly, Christopher from Slovenia had applied for up to 40 positions and said that ‘not having [any] Australian experience was a bit of a problem’. Khalid, an agricultural engineer/landscaper from Iraq, has two years’ work experience in landscaping, was frustrated with trying to find work: ‘...You need experience here in Australia... how can you get experience here in Australia? This is a problem for us, you know.’

Finding work that is comparable to their previous employment was an important goal for all interviewees. However, consistent with other research (Dyer et al 2009), a number of interviewees had either accepted employment in lower paid sectors, particularly in service jobs in retail and hospitality, or feared they might have to do so. For example, Sunita, a bank reconciler from Bangladesh, had taken a position at a local supermarket in a client service role; Jasmin, a primary school teacher from India, found a casual catering job in a local hospital; Rani, a primary school teacher from India, was working in a casual housekeeping job with a large hotel.

Lack of local work experience is a profound barrier for many skilled migrants seeking employment within their profession (Liversage 2009). Thus many settle for lower skilled work in occupations that differ significantly to positions held prior to migration, and do not fully reflect the qualifications and skills that these migrants have brought with them (Cooke 2007). The recognition of overseas skills and qualifications is an additional barrier for migrants (Dyer et al 2009). Eleven participants had applied for recognition of their qualifications
through the Queensland Government. Some were required to complete additional courses or undertake tests to meet registration requirements.

Skill recognition was the cause of much confusion for Andrei. His qualifications were not assessed as equivalent to a Bachelor degree, and he was undertaking additional courses to reach this level, as well as English language courses. However, Andrei’s wife was the primary skilled visa applicant. He was confused as to why his wife, a hairdresser with 19 years’ experience, was unable to find work: ‘She tried to find a job, but it doesn’t work. …her qualification was not recognised… She wants to work, she can work, and, but nowhere to begin [pauses], I don’t know?’ Andrei’s wife was advised that she should apply for an apprenticeship: ‘So she’s applied for many, many, positions as an apprentice, and has been unsuccessful. …but you need Australian qualification, Russian qualification does not meet… this profession [is] in shortage list, this was the main reason to give us visa.’ There is a paradox here: skilled migrants who have been granted a visa based on their skills and qualifications nevertheless often experience significant difficulties in finding employment.

Further education and training was undertaken by eight of the 12 interviewees. Some were undertaking English language courses through TAFE to improve their language skills. Others were taking courses in their professional area. Sunita, an accountant with four years’ experience from Bangladesh, had returned to TAFE to complete studies in accounting, hoping that this would increase her opportunity to find work. Others were taking courses in fields unrelated to their employment background just to get a job. For example, Hayat said that her husband Zameer was undertaking courses to help him find
work: ‘He take many many course[s]... at Southbank [TAFE]. In childcare, and securities...’

The interview data demonstrate that the often-reported barriers of language, lack of local work experience, and skill and qualification recognition remain problematic for skilled migrants (Dyer et al 2009) and this becomes a vicious cycle, with lack of work experience creating ongoing and often permanent un- or under-employment. In some cases, skilled migrants were undertaking additional study to assist their progress. However, additional courses do not always increase these job seekers’ chances of achieving their career goals (Cooke 2007). Of greatest concern to interviewees is that they fear that they will lose their skills if they are not able to find work in their chosen occupation within a reasonable time frame.

OBSTACLES FOR DUAL-CAREER COUPLES

During the interviews it became clear that the experience of job seeking was a joint one. Decisions were taken within the family and priorities discussed. Many migrant couples experience the ‘double bind’ (Alcorso & Ho, 2006, p. 115) of lack of local job experience and skill recognition, meaning that both need to undertake some further training to provide a chance of obtaining employment. There is a strong likelihood that one or both individuals in a couple will experience downward occupational and/or social mobility (Cooke 2007; Ho, 2004; 2006). Furthermore, women who are qualified and hold positions in traditionally male occupations (for example, engineering) are more likely than men, or women in traditional female occupations, to experience deskilling and enter feminised occupations (Alcorso & Ho 2006; Dyer et al 2009; Ho & Alcorso 2004; Raghuram 2008).
The following section explores in more detail participants’ responses to the difficulties and barriers faced in seeking employment together with the experiences of their spouse/partners. The themes included highlight the barriers of managing on a low income, issues of downward occupational and social mobility, and the juggling of work and/or study with childcare needs.

**COUPLES MANAGING ON A LOW INCOME**

The cost of living in Australia is a critical issue faced by all migrants. This can negatively affect the likelihood of finding employment in their profession because they need to find work to support the family. If unable to find employment in their profession, many are willing to take jobs in low-paid sectors of the labour market to make ends meet.

These issues are exemplified by the case of Jasmin, who arrived from India on a skilled visa with her husband and a young child. The couple’s first priority was to put food on the table and to pay rent for their home. Jasmin’s occupation was a primary school teacher but she had been unable to register with the state registration board, a prerequisite to obtain work, and was advised that she required additional training. The problem was that the cost of undertaking the additional training was prohibitive. Jasmin took a job in the hospitality industry to be able to gain local work experience, and her husband, a skilled carpenter, worked as a meat packer. But the situation was less than ideal, as Jasmin explains:

> It is very difficult that we first undergo all that training...first I have to do training if I want to get a job, then he [husband] may undergo the training, because we won’t go at the same time...because we need money to survive here.
Due to financial constraints, the couple decided that Jasmin would pursue her career ahead of her husband, and at the time of the interview she was looking at ways to do this.

Tuition costs could be another worry. When Christopher was looking for work, he relied on savings to provide for his family. When he could not find a job, he was ‘more and more worried’, and said that living in Australia ‘is not cheap…I’d rather spend my savings on…I don’t know, like buying a house to live in…’ While gaining employment comparable to their position prior to migration is important, the first concern is to ensure that basic living needs are met, thus forcing skilled migrants to take positions in lower paid occupations resulting in declines in both occupational and social mobility (Cooke 2007; Ho 2006; Ho & Alcorso 2004).

Cultural factors were also a problem that placed further strain upon the cost of living for two of the interviewees. Nareem and his wife shared a two-bedroom unit with another family in Brisbane’s inner city. The realities of daily life were hard: ‘my full-time job is not sufficient; ...I am driving a taxi so that I can afford to pay the rent. ...I work 38 hours in my full time job, then I do one day driving a taxi. Sunday is the only day I have off.’ Nareem and his wife’s combined income were just enough to cover family expenditure. In addition, as the oldest son in his family, he was expected to meet cultural obligations and provide for his parents who lived overseas.

Ayanna reported similar responsibilities and she sent money to her mother and her siblings in Ethiopia.
DOWNWARD OCCUPATIONAL AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Downward occupational and social mobility (Ho 2006; Ho & Alcorso 2004) was experienced by many interviewees and their partners. George was disappointed about his own and his teacher wife’s ability to find work in their own fields. Although he was able to find work, it was not in his chosen career: ‘

In this I can say to you, I’m lucky, and I am disappointed… I am disappointed because I hope, I think I have to find a job very soon because my work is mining engineer…[it] is difficult. I never get any [job in my field]…[but] I am lucky because I found another job for now.

Christopher’s experience was similar. He had not found work in his profession, but was recruited for a job placement and training program designed for overseas professionals. His wife, a high school teacher, worked part-time in an administrative role. Christopher said that he and his wife were ‘quite aware of…making a substantial break in career because my previous employer did not have any operation in Australia…so we started from scratch once again’.

Downward mobility was also experienced by Rani, a primary school teacher, who had taken work as a housekeeper in an upmarket city hotel. She was planning to do further study: ‘but I have to earn money… I will go most probably [and do] childcare…because I have a difficulty in understanding Australian accent, so once I get used to it, then I will further continue in my teaching.’ The absence of familial networks had further limited her options, however, ‘my mother-in-law [who] is a principal in a government school back home…is taking voluntary retirement… She’s planning to come here to look after my son, then I will…continue my studies.’ Rani’s
husband Naveen had enjoyed a lengthy career as a production engineer in India, and he was working as a security officer: ‘but now he got really frustrated, really frustrated, and then he got a job, he did security course...for one month and then he got a job in security...so he is working in security for money...not [for] job satisfaction.’

Rani indicated that Naveen had applied for many jobs in his field, and the main reason he was unable to secure a job was lack of local experience. Rani then told me that Naveen says: ‘I’ll go back. Why I have come? I want to go back.’ She added: ‘The main thing is job satisfaction. He’s still trying in his field.’

The loss of social networks was felt keenly by Fareeza and Khalid. In their home country they did not experience issues with childcare because there was always family there to help with the children. Hayat also felt very much on her own. She said she had made no friends here, she did not even know her neighbours and she felt the loss of the relationships she had with her family she left behind.

This research reveals that it is very difficult for skilled migrants to secure employment in an occupation equivalent to a position held in their originating country, certainly within the short term. For those who have found employment, these jobs are almost always in lower level occupations (Connell & Burgess 2009; Cooke 2007; Ho 2006) and thus these migrants face downward occupational mobility. Furthermore, flexibility around childcare has diminished, and feelings of loneliness and isolation are increased due to the loss of established social and familial networks (Cooke 2007; Ho & Alcorso 2004; Iredale 2005).
WORK, STUDY AND THE CHILDCARE JUGGLE

The juggle of work, undertaking additional study and managing children was a major issue for many of the couples with children. Khalid and Fareeza were completing courses in English and computing respectively; however, once they found employment, they were unsure about how they could take care of the children. Fareeeza explained that ‘the day job in Australia here, it is very long. From 9 o’clock to 5 o’clock. And what about the people who have children at school? I don’t know, I don’t know? But we can manage this problem at the moment.’

Both Debbie and John, who have a young daughter, used a number of strategies to seek work in their professions. John undertook study at a local TAFE college while working up to 20 hours per week as a casual cashier at a local supermarket. Debbie was accepted into a council work placement program on a full-time basis. When I asked how Debbie and John managed childcare arrangements around school pick-up times, Debbie replied that ‘at the moment, we don’t have any trouble because my mother-in-law is here... She comes [here] taking care of my daughter. She will go back to China in August, because of the visa.’ With help from family, this couple had flexibility to seek employment and undertake training to assist them to find jobs. However, balancing work, study and childcare would become more problematic once John’s mother returns to China.

Sunita has juggled childcare, casual work and study. She had some difficulties in her casual job and felt that she had been discriminated against on the grounds of race. She left her job and continued her studies in accounting. She was concerned about having another child and did not know what to do:
I don’t know actually, you can understand... I have to finish my study, I have to get a job. I want a little one!... It’s all the pressure comes to our, girl [to us as women]. Husbands, they are very much relaxed about their job, they haven’t much tension...[it is a] difficult strain on everything to take another baby.

Sunita’s comment highlights the intersecting effects of gender and race in disadvantaging her career and employment prospects. She has experienced downward occupational mobility through employment in a lower level occupation; racial discrimination in the workplace; the need to re-train in the hope of obtaining better access to the labour market; and finally the intersection of gendered norms regarding work and home.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Skilled migrants face significant barriers to employment in their chosen profession in Australia. The well-known obstacles include language fluency, local work experience and skill recognition (Alcorso & Ho 2006; Birrell & Rapson 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). Most participants in this study have encountered one, but usually more, of these problems when trying to find employment. As a result many have to adapt by attempting to re-educate themselves in the hope of improving employment outcomes, but often their new occupations are at a lower skill level – and pay – than their original profession (Raghuram 2008).

This research has reported on additional hidden factors that add further complexity for migrant workers seeking to make new lives for themselves. Complex negotiations take place within the migrating family unit. The family, particularly the
couple, jointly negotiate the employment search process, bringing additional issues into the mix and compounding the disadvantage already experienced. Furthermore, migrants encounter complex gender, societal and cultural norms that can further influence employment outcomes. These issues create additional dilemmas for migrant women who wish to continue in their professional careers.

The intersectionality literature helps us unravel this complexity using both a race and gender lens (Adib & Guerrier 2003; Holgate et al 2006). Further, the perspective of skilled migrants as couples or parents is also important but has not hitherto been as well documented as the experience of individuals, particularly males (Cobb-Clark et al 2001). This adds another perspective that provides further understanding of the overall migrant experience, in particular the choices made by migrant women – and men – that are based around gender norms (Cooke 2007; Iredale 2005; Liversage 2009; McKinnish 2008; Raghuram 2008; Taylor 2007), in the context of a labour market where males (Acker 2006, 2005; Eveline 1994; Walby 1990) and MESB workers continue to be advantaged.

The research has shown that family decision-making processes around employment are evident. Jasmin’s case provides insight into decisions about career pursuit and how this is managed around family. Priorities are placed in order to provide a stable living for the family and security for children. Cost of re-education and cultural obligations can also constrain employment choices and place strain upon employment decisions, resulting in the undertaking of jobs in the lower skilled end of the labour market. The research has confirmed that the well-documented barriers to migrant
employment persist. In addition, this research has applied the concept of ‘intersectionality’ to further unpack the complexities that skilled migrant couples and families, particularly women, face when both partners seek employment. Therefore, this research illustrates the migrant experience as a multi-dimensional, complex, and negotiated sphere; one where issues of gender, race and family can create disadvantage for skilled migrants seeking employment in the Australian labour market.

FOOTNOTE
1. The Australian Government has recently modified the Skilled Migration Program, announcing early in 2010 that the Migration Occupation in Demand List (MODL) was to be revoked (DIAC 2010a p. 1) and that visa applications through the Program would be suspended. The government has reduced the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) from approximately 400 occupations to 181 (DIAC 2010b, p. 1). Occupations removed include hairdressers and cooks, while occupations within the engineering, health, teaching, childcare and some technical and trades services still remain (DIAC 2010c). Besides changing the composition of Australia’s skilled migrant intake, these changes will possibly change the context for future skilled migrant arrivals.

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**TOWARD VISION 2020: ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING PRACTICES IN MALAYSIA**

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**ABSTRACT**  
The Malaysian Government has adopted organisational learning as a key strategy to assist the country achieve its Vision 2020. This paper reports on a study that investigated the organisational learning strategies practised in Malaysian organisations across four key industries: government, manufacturing, health and academic. Western authors define organisational learning as a process of knowledge acquisition that involves continuous change to create, acquire and transfer knowledge (Garvin 1993; Miller 1996; Williams 2001). The study sought to determine the extent of learning strategies currently being implemented to obtain and transfer knowledge, as well as assess further opportunities for take-up of learning strategies. Thirty-five managers, government officials and academics participated in in-depth interviews in 2004. Data was transcribed manually, and then interrogated using NVivo software to explore similarities and differences within and between the sectors. The findings suggest Malaysian organisations which are implementing organisational learning strategies prefer active and cooperative learning strategies that are
delivered through structured training and development programs.

INTRODUCTION
As an emerging industrial economy, the Malaysian government is encouraging organisations to build their internal capacity to compete globally. This support can be seen in the ninth Malaysian plan: ‘the nation’s human capital will be the most critical element in the achievement of the National Mission, and thus human capital development will be a key thrust’ (The Ninth Malaysian plan Ch 11, page 237). This initiative matches the widely accepted view that organisations need to continuously improve and adapt if they are to remain competitive (Brown & Brudney, 2003). The resource-based theory of organisations argues that organisations are dependent on the resources they draw from their internal and external environment and having effective and effectively managed personnel create competitive advantages (Barney & Wright, 1998; Boxall, 1996). One way of maximizing the benefits of human capital is through implementing organisational learning strategies, an approach well supported by the Malaysian government and one that has been adopted by many organisations. The value of knowledge acquisition is strongly promoted by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato’ Seri Abdullah Hj Ahmad Badawi, who argues that engaging in continuous and lifelong learning will benefit Malaysia’s growth and development (Bernama, 2005).

The pace of change means modern organisations need knowledge and the ability to respond quickly (Poell, Chivers, Van der Krogt & Wildemeersch, 2000: Ni & Sun, 2009), so implementing organisational learning develops internal
capacity that helps organisations remain competitive (Orr, 2000) by promoting performance and effectiveness (Orr, 2000; Robinson et al. 1997). As well as the organisational benefits, proponents claim organisational learning strategies also foster positive employee outcomes by promoting job satisfaction (Jenkins, Antil, Wayne & Vadas, 2003; Ozuah, Curtis & Stein, 2001), commitment (Becker 1997; Lancaster & Strand, 2001) and loyalty, which combine to reduce turnover and absenteeism (Bowman & Ambrosini, 1997). Although there are numerous studies investigating organisational learning, there appears to be limited evaluations of practices within Malaysia. One study in the hotel industry identified that while managers agreed learning was important, implementation strategies were very limited (Arshad & Scott-Ladd, 2008).

This present study reports the outcome of interviews with practising managers, government officials and academics regarding their understanding of organisational learning. A key objective of the study was to ascertain the learning strategies used to acquire and implement learning and knowledge. From this, the aim is to identify not only the level of implementation, but also the strategies and processes that lead to the most effective implementation. The next section of the paper establishes the research agenda and provides an overview of the literature to provide empirical justification for this study. This leads to the research question and choice of a qualitative in-depth interview methodology.

The results of the study are discussed next and the findings are supported with a number of quotations from the respondents. The final section of the paper discusses the results in relation to the current literature and understanding
of organisational learning practices; this is followed by a discussion of the implications for theory and practitioners, particularly those operating in the Southeast Asian environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW
In keeping with the purpose of this paper, the literature review firstly discusses the broader literature on organisational learning. This review identifies that various forms of learning can occur in both formal and informal settings. Learning can be from either direct experiences or from the experiences of other people and occur through a number of mechanisms, simultaneously or singularly. Previous research has categorized six different mechanisms that aid learning in organisations, with these being; 1. Action learning; 2. Active learning; 3. Experiential learning; 4. Cooperative learning; 5. Problem-based learning; and 6. Coaching and mentoring; and these are explained below.

Action Learning
Miller (2003), and York and Marsick (2000) describe action learning as highly participatory in that learning can be drawn from the real life problems and experiences of others and the actions they take (Rhodes & Shiel, 2007). Learning is drawn both from the feedback and as a result of problem solving. An example given by Robinson (2001) and Bourner (1999) is the learning that occurs when a group of peers meet regularly to discuss problems they are having prior to testing in action the ideas arising from that discussion. Williams (2001) qualifies this by arguing that just solving a problem is not sufficient as evidence of organisational learning, but drawing on beliefs that have worked in the past to solve a problem is evidence of learning. In short, action learning is the
combination of group discussion and experimentation that leads to sharing of knowledge that results in some form of action being taken based on the recommended solution, such as is needed in times of change.

Action learning strategies are therefore appropriate strategies for strategic decision-making and managing change (Dotlich & Noel, 1998) as it equips managers and organisational leaders with lifelong learning skills if they understand and can use the process. Progressive learning by individuals within organisations can provide a competitive advantage in the rapidly changing environment, particularly for knowledge intensive industries (Stata, 1989), which provides a rationale for the adoption of an action learning approach. Another type of learning that is somewhat similar is active learning.

Active Learning
Thomas (1998) and Boyer (2002) explain that active learning comes from allowing the learning process to take place through activities such as problem solving, teamwork, simulations, case study, feedback, small group discussion, brainstorming, reading, and writing. Actively analyzing present knowledge and understanding allows individuals and groups to synthesize their awareness and construct new knowledge. According to Boyer (2002), this approach is more effective at enhancing achievement than conventional methods and is thereby likely to lead to greater employee performance in organisations. In addition, Becker (1997) argues that this form of learning not only provides better learning outcomes, but it increases the learner’s commitment to learning. This is because active learning locates the learner in a real situation where they learn by doing the work. Having
had the experience the learner can then recall what they have done and reflect on their understanding (McGoldrick, Battle, & Gallagher, 2000). Being engaged in the process means emotions and intuition are more likely to be involved, which in turn helps to achieve a higher level of expertise because of their engagement with these experiences. Yet another benefit is that knowledge is constructed in a collective way (McGoldrick et al. 2000). Despite this being an effective learning strategy, Salemi (2002) suggests it is seldom used because “chalk and talk” is still the dominant pedagogy in many colleges and institutions.

The next approach to learning is experiential learning.

**Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning is learning by doing, and can occur either in or outside the classroom (Hickox, 2002). Outside learning emphasizes practical experiences and within the workplace this is referred to as on-the-job training, whereas classroom-learning tries to simulate the real situation and uses strategies such as role-playing or case study methods (Geertshuis & Fazey, 2006). Experiential learning recognizes the link between personal experience and learning and suggests a reversal of the traditional “theory to application” mode of instruction (Hickox, 2002; Cooke, Dunscombe & Lee, 2007). The learners use their experiences to formulate new models of thought through reflection and guided discussion, which can then be compared and contrasted with existing theories to provide an opportunity for further critique.

Fiol and Lyles (1985) observed that organisations do learn from their experiences and past incidents will influence future actions. Thus, a successful action in the past becomes a
guideline for similar circumstances. For example, most organisations use post-project reviews, internal audits and/or oral post-mortems to learn from their own experiences. Gustavsson and Harung (1994) argue that it is the level of collective consciousness that determines the quality of life and the level of performance of the organisation. Therefore, learning aims to facilitate a greater awareness of the capacity for organisational development.

As well as learning ‘through doing’, another approach is to learn, in cooperation with others.

**Co-Operative Learning**
Co-operative learning occurs in a learning group; here individuals assist each other and are empowered to make decisions that contribute to the groups success (Jenkins et al. 2003). This approach has the benefit of allowing the learner to feel responsible and accountable (Lancaster & Strand, 2001) for their own learning. Co-operative learning encourages involvement, and leads to increased self-esteem and success rates. These, along with a safe learning environment are the three most frequently named benefits of cooperative learning (Jenkins et al. 2003). These findings are borne out by a meta-analysis of three hundred studies investigating academic achievement and comparing the relative effectiveness of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning on individual achievement in college and adult settings (Lancaster & Strand, 2001). The results of 168 of the studies strongly favoured cooperative learning as promoting higher individual achievement when compared to competitive approaches or individual efforts. In addition, this approach often has commonalities with problem-based learning.
**Problem-Based Learning (PBL)**

Another approach to learning is problem-based learning (PBL). This is self-regulated learning and occurs where a group or team are given a problem to solve and each member has to come up with a solution (Ozuah et al., 2001). Torp and Sage (2002) define problem-based learning as:

...focused, experiential learning (minds-on, hands-on) organised around the investigation and resolution of messy, real-world problems... ’[pg. 15-16].

A strength of this approach, and the reason why results are so positive, is that it uses real-life experiences. For example, an American study by Ozuah et al., (2001) found this approach significantly increased levels of self-directed learning, satisfaction, performance and motivation to learn among eighty paediatric residents at a large urban academic medical centre. Another strength identified by Stroulia and Goel (1994) was that learners targeted knowledge that specifically solved their own problems. Therefore, improvements in problem-solving performance is one way of evaluating the quality of learning, recognizing of course that different models of problem solving have differing knowledge needs, and, as a result, set up different learning tasks and enable different kinds of performance improvement (Gustavsson 2007). Advocates of PBL claim it enhances content knowledge and fosters the development of communication, problem-solving, and self-directed learning, and when undertaken with the support of experienced others, it fits within the approach provided by coaching and mentoring.

**Coaching and Mentoring**

Coaching and mentoring are ‘one to one’ learning processes where an experienced partner gives guidance and prepares
another to be self-reliant, even if achieved through different means. Brocato (2003) defines coaching as a process of helping a team member improve a specific work behaviour or skill. In contrast, a mentor is a role model who offers support to another person (McBrien & Brandt, 1997). The mentor has knowledge and experience in an area and shares this with the mentee. For example, the experienced teacher mentoring a student provides a ‘valuable form of social development and a vital support mechanism’ (Clawson 1996, pp. 6-15). The difference between the two is that unlike a counsellor or mentor, the coach helps clients find their own solutions, by asking questions that give them insight into their situations, rather than offering advice (Brocato, 2003). The coach holds the client accountable, so if a client agrees to a plan to achieve a goal, the coach will help motivate them to complete that plan. In this sentence, the relationship can be either ‘top-down’, as occurs when a leader provides coaching, or from peers who have more experience. According to Hutchinson, (2007), effective coaching and guidance from the line manager has a significant relationship with employees’ satisfaction, commitment and motivation.

Quite apart from the above learning mechanisms, whether learning is formal or informal can also be important in facilitating the success of the learning process, as is explained below.

**Formal and Informal Learning**

Formal learning refers to formal training that is planned and scheduled by the organisation; for example, yearly, half-yearly or quarterly training programs, which are conducted either in-house or outside the organisation. In addition, organisations can support external learning programs, such as
Education Assistance Programs (EAP) that aids employee career development. Organisations generally view formal training as an effective mechanism for imparting and obtaining new skills and knowledge. Some organisations see little difference between training and learning, and some organisations even include training as part of their corporate objectives. Valley (1992) differentiates training as something individuals have done to them, whereas, learning is something individuals do for themselves. Training is often about learning a specific skill set, whereas learning is more holistic (Kimmerle, Cress, & Held, 2010). This means that learning is more efficient at achieving performance compared to training. On the other hand, informal learning occurs when learning takes place as part of an unplanned activity.

Informal learning occurs when employees learn from others while ‘on the job’. This can arise through any number of mechanisms, such as active learning, action learning, experiential learning and problem-based learning. The assumption that learning only occurs through formal training is narrow in scope and fails to recognize the significant contribution occurring through less formal means. Informal learning can also pick up on ideas from training sessions, so is also affected by the formal training. Learning can happen in any setting; from observing others, getting feedback or advice from co-workers or even during a discussion over the lunch or tea break. For example, Oxtoby (1992) suggests that corporate learning can come from sharing information about eliminating waste at work, so that the knowledge is more broadly applied. Similarly, Williams (2001) claims that individual learning is often shaped by circumstances rather than by intention. Thus, sharing information and beliefs about the interpretation of information are two pre-requisites for
this alliance. Linking learning to business changes provides the opportunity for continuous improvement, which leads to improved organisational performance (Ni & Sun, 2009).

The literature provides not only an understanding of organisational learning strategy, but evidence that organisational learning strategies are widely accepted and expanding (Ni & Sun, 2009; Kimmerle et al., 2010). This expansion happens because learning strategies allow organisations to draw on their internal pool of knowledge and information to deliver effective and efficient operations. Given that many Malaysian industries have already entered the Global and South East Asian marketplace and others are seeking opportunities to compete more effectively, research into how organisational learning strategies are understood and practised, is timely. Knowing about individual experiences and expectations and which learning strategies prove most effective within the Malaysian cultural context will provide a benchmark for going forward. This study examines perceptions about the implementation of organisational learning, to identify practices and strategies that can benefit other organisations in Malaysia and in the wider global marketplace. What are the most popular organisational learning strategies used by Malaysian organisation and which are perceived to be most effective?

**METHODOLOGY**
A qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate approach for developing an in-depth understanding about organisational learning and practices being undertaken. As this research investigates both existing research and the tacit knowledge of people involved in the industry, the nature of
the research is both exploratory and explanatory so a combined interpretive and constructivist approach was deemed the most appropriate paradigm and methodology. The ‘Interpretive/Constructivist’ paradigm proposes that people construct knowledge in social settings (Gregg, Kulkarni & Vinze, 2001), based on their practices and traditions (Kim 2003) and this helps to construct their perception of reality. Thus, the ontology underpinning the study is that individuals make sense of, or give meaning to, what goes on in the world around them (Pearsall & Trumble, 2002). In support of this, the epistemological stance was to ask open-ended questions and data was gathered from in-depth interviews with 35 respondents.

Sample
Participants were drawn from the manufacturing, health and public sectors and included human resource directors, managers or executives and academics, to harness different perspectives on what is happening. The respondents occupied positions as professors or lecturers, administrators, directors (or assistant directors), or were managers or executives. The majority were from the manufacturing sector as this is the second most influenced by international trade and competitiveness. A number of the manufacturing sector respondents represented foreign multinational companies, (from United States, Germany, Canada, Taiwan and Japan) as well as local Malaysian companies. Public and private organisations were represented. Overall, the respondents were experienced practitioners in the field and had clear views on the topic, despite having differing levels of understanding. Information pertaining to the respondents’ backgrounds is presented below in Table 1.
Table 1: Respondents’ Backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>No of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Government</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Health</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Manufacturing</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Manufacturing respondents were drawn from either a membership list of the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) or the telephone directory for the Northern region of Malaysia, due to its proximity to Penang. Selected organisations were contacted via email and telephone to gain agreement to participate, clarify the purpose of the study and set an appointment time for the interview. Interviews were semi-structured and on average each interview took approximately two hours. Written consent was obtained from all respondents and the usual guarantees of confidentiality were given. All interviews were recorded.

The interviews were transcribed and the recordings and the data were sorted based on the interview questions and emergent themes using N-Vivo software. The software was used to manage the data and generate the frequency of discussion on each theme. Themes were all then checked manually to ensure that no themes were missed due to participants using different terms or indirect wording. Any areas of discussion that appeared unconvincing were also revisited and checked manually. This provided a backup for the analysis and ensured the richness of the data and
significant contributions were captured, which also makes the analysis more meaningful and reliable.

RESULTS
Approaches to Learning used in Malaysian Companies
Many of the respondents struggled to articulate a definition of organisational learning; for example, the academics made comments similar to ‘T&D is actually part of OL and a tool used in order to implement OL, while OL is more of a culture within the organisation (Academic 1)’. Respondents from other categories often made little distinction between training and development and learning strategies, as is demonstrated by this comment from a manufacturing respondent ‘Training is a tool to implement Organisational Learning in-line with the company’s vision and mission, to develop the staff competency through formal and informal training and On the Job Training’ (Manufacturer 10). Others, like this health respondent suggested: ‘To us, learning culture and organisational learning is the same and this is the culture that we want to develop ... there is still more to learn’ (Health 1). Many reiterated this theme of developing a knowledge culture.

All respondents agreed that knowledge could be acquired through a number of strategies. They emphasised that developing a knowledge culture within the organisation was important to successfully nurture and grow knowledge. They believed that the secret of being creative and efficiently acquiring knowledge was to have a positive attitude towards exploring knowledge and appreciating new ideas and information. For most, this meant using the fastest, cheapest, most effective and efficient methods of acquiring knowledge, as is identified in the following comment:
'learning is always important; in fact, we always encourage employees to gain knowledge by whatever means.' (Government Respondent, G7); ‘Learning is either hard skills or soft skill but you learn every day and all the time’ (Manufacturing Respondent, M1.).

The respondents in the study suggested there were many approaches to acquiring knowledge. These included:

1. Product based knowledge, whereby the type of product will determine the appropriate method to learn the skills and acquire other required knowledge;
2. Resource centers, such as a library, video centre and reading room for self-learning;
3. Databases, which are managed by the IT or Training department;
4. Information technology that promotes the use of intra departmental mailing systems;
5. Hiring external consultants to study the organisation;
6. Public and private academic institutions where organisations send staff for short and long-term courses;
7. Problem solving committees like Quality Circles (QC); and,
8. An attachment or visit to another organisation or the parent company

In addition, respondents suggested that attending professional courses such as seminars, conferences, workshops, and discussions, as well as studying the forecast changes in business trends and examining and understanding...
product and customers’ needs all allowed an organisation to acquire knowledge. Other means they identified were through conducting laboratory experiments; performing on the job training; and establishing a mentoring system. Several also stressed the importance of an appropriate organisational structure that facilitated both horizontal and vertical communication and knowledge capture.

These finding show that Malaysian companies are implementing, at least in part, many of the learning strategies identified as prevalent in the west. Respondents gave examples of action, active, experiential, cooperative and problem based learning, as well as coaching and mentoring; in addition, they identified a mix of formal and informal learning strategies. Table 2 matches the learning strategies identified in the study with those found in the literature.

The commonality between the methods identified in the literature and practised in Malaysia, suggests that despite giving limited definitions of Organisational Learning, many organisations were implementing learning strategies. The manufacturing sector had the highest and most consistent understanding of organisational learning, viewing it as a long-term strategy for skill enhancement and continuous knowledge acquisition. Government respondents held a similar, though less consistently articulated view, whereas, academics were more inclined to view it as a cultural attribute or opportunity for knowledge acquisition. The lowest level of awareness, with little or no differentiation between organisational learning and training and development, was among the health sector.
### Table 2: Comparison of Learning Strategies practiced in Malaysia with those cited in the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Strategies</th>
<th>Literature Findings</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
2. Group discussion.  
3. Experimentation        | 1. Research and consultancy (9)  
2. Brainstorming and dialogue (23) | TOTAL: 32                                                                         |
3. Simulation.  
5. Feedback  
7. Brainstorming  
4. Case work  
6. Small group discussion  
8. Reading        | 1. Brainstorming and dialogue (23)  
2. Experiential learning (24)  
3. Self learning (25)  
4. Online (18)  
5. Outsourcing and networking (7) | TOTAL: 97                                                                         |
| 3. Experiential Learning | a. Outside Classroom:  
1. Practical experiences  
2. On-the-job training        | 1. Experiential learning (24)  
2. On the Job Training (OJT) (18)  
3. Attachment and exposure (25) | TOTAL: 67                                                                         |
|                          | b. Inside Classroom  
1. Role-playing  
2. Case study  
3. Post-project reviews  
4. Internal audits  
5. Oral post mortem     |                                                                                  |                                                                                  |
2. Classroom             | 1. Classroom (15)  
2. Seminar and conferences (24)  
3. Education Program (17)  
4. Training and development activities (20) | TOTAL: 76                                                                         |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Problem based Learning</th>
<th>1. Problem solving group</th>
<th>1. Experiential learning (24)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Formal Learning</td>
<td>1. Training program</td>
<td>1. Formal (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Education Assistance Program</td>
<td>2. Classroom (15)</td>
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<td>3. Seminar and conferences (24)</td>
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<td>5. Training and development activities (20)</td>
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<td>6. Research and consultancy (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Attachment and exposure (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL: 23</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Informal Learning</td>
<td>1. Observation</td>
<td>1. Informal (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Advice</td>
<td>2. Experiential learning (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Feedback</td>
<td>3. Coaching and mentoring (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Discussion over lunch or tea break</td>
<td>4. On the Job Training (OJT) (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Self learning (25)</td>
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<td>6. Online (18)</td>
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<td>7. Outsourcing and networking (7)</td>
</tr>
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<td>8. Brainstorming and dialogue (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL: 144</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Number in brackets refer to the number of items raised by individual respondents.
DISCUSSION
Although Malaysian organisations use a number of strategies to acquire knowledge, the various industries agreed that the most popular strategy was structured training and development programs. Most respondents favoured having a specialist department that provided a hub for handling knowledge and skills acquisition for both internal and external learning sources, but did not preclude individual departments, such as finance, operations, or maintenance conducting their own learning activities. The central theme of development related to individuals’ specific jobs and focused on problem solving, changes to jobs or the introduction of new technologies. The range of strategies included experiential, participative, active learning, coaching and mentoring.

A number of organisations referred to the importance of providing a learning environment, such as a library or other resources, to encourage self-directed learning as well as the importance of learning taking place through day-to-day activities. The main principle for determining the learning strategy was to choose the best method, with the least cost, time and energy, to improve processes and produce quality outputs, as was previously identified by Joseph (1995). This matches Williams’ (2001) argument that learning is shaped by the circumstances or nature of the business, its financial strength, product needs, technology and human resource development requirements.

Most respondents also acknowledged that internal resources had a key role in knowledge dissemination. They often relied on managers or other employees to pass on or share their knowledge or skills by running classes, giving seminars or
demonstrating with on-the-job training, to develop the knowledge and skills of other employees. This approach strengthens and spreads knowledge throughout the entire organisation and aligns with learning network-theory, where interactions among employees, managers, training consultants and others affect learning mechanisms and outcomes (Poell et al. 2000).

The respondents did not categorize the learning methods their organisations used as active, action or cooperative learning and so forth, but rather they explained the method and then referred to examples, which matched categories identified in the literature. For example, laboratory experimentation and product based learning are examples of action based learning (Miller, 2003; York & Marsick, 2000); Having a problem-solving committee, resource centre, maintaining databases and supporting learning through information technology are all examples of active learning (McGoldrick, Battle & Gallagher, 2000; Salemi, 2002).

Examples of experiential learning were evident in on-the-job training, attachments or visits to other organisations, and in some classroom training (Hickox, 2002; Gustavsson & Harung, 1994).

Cooperative learning was implemented through formal organisational structures, and teamwork within organisations (Jenkins et al., 2003) and specific examples of rubber based learning were setting up of problem solving groups and bringing in external consultants (Ozuah et al. 2001). Mentoring systems were also in place, which matches the recommendations of Brocato (2003).
The breadth of the strategies shows that like their competitors worldwide, Malaysian organisations pursued strategies that suited their own philosophy and circumstance.

This lends further support to Williams’ (2001) contention that organisations shape learning strategies to fit their circumstances. This is borne out in the preferred use of active and cooperative learning as primary learning strategies, which matches similar findings in the literature. McGoldrich et al. (2000) argue that active learning allows for a collective construction of knowledge, which makes it a very effective learning strategy. The word ‘active’ suggests that learners are actively seeking knowledge, either individually, as a group, or through formal or informal channels to enhance their knowledge, skills and capability to fulfill the demands of their work or job. Active learning also has the benefit of being a cost-effective way to improve quality and knowledge capacity.

The benefit of cooperative learning, which was the second most popular learning strategy used by Malaysian organisations, is that it promotes higher individual achievement because the individual efforts are more transparent to others (Jenkins et al. 2003). For this reason, Lancaster and Strand (2001) suggest that cooperative learning also makes the individual more responsible and accountable. This is a significant cultural shift for many Malaysian organisations. Recent studies support earlier findings by Hofstede that Malaysians tend to be collectivist, in that they have high levels of trust, loyalty and belonging; they are generally willing to accept differences in hierarchy, and rely heavily on personalised relationships (Ahmad, 2004). There are certainly differences between the two main ethnic
groups; the Malays and Chinese. The Chinese are denoted as being more competitive, hard-working and financially driven, whereas the Malays are more fatalistic and concerned with maintaining traditions (Ahmad, 2004). However, these attributes are likely to change as organisations adopt more Western practices because of changes associated with globalisation.

The respondents indicated that Malaysian organisations are adopting western practices for a number of reasons. Internationalisation and globalisation are forcing organisations to match international practices, and this is particularly the case for companies affiliated with or controlled by an overseas company. The international practices in relationships influence the learning strategies adopted at the local level (Collings, Scullion & Dowling, 2009). In addition, information is now more readily available and companies wishing to compete globally and sustain their business operations have access to knowledge and information via the media and through technology.

Other influences are the multi-cultural diversity of the population, particularly the many Indian and Chinese migrants, where a common language facilitates commerce, and more recently the exposure to western education and culture (Data Monitor, 2009). Similarly, respondents indicated that the influence of dealing or trading with American, Australian and European companies means companies have to adopt standards that are acceptable to customers in those countries.

This study also found evidence that other learning strategies such as experiential, action and problem-based learning as
well as mentoring and coaching were practised. Again, this seems to be further evidence to support Williams’ (2001) claim that learning choices are often contingent on the circumstances. Organisations need to consider which is the best learning strategy choice in relation to the type of knowledge that is required, when and where the knowledge can be acquired and what will maximize understanding and transfer of knowledge to the employees (Williams, 2001).

Malaysian companies are also more inclined to use informal learning strategies in preference to formal learning strategies as this allows the organisation to maintain control and keep costs down. Providing resources at the workplace not only encourages a learning environment, it means that learning can be ‘just in time’ in that the new skill is learned when it is most needed, or learnt in smaller chunks that once applied will aid retention. Providing the environment within the workplace, such as databases, resource centers, and information technology, also supports and encourages independent learning. This matches examples cited in the western literature by Bechtold (2000) and Dowd (2000), among others, who argue that informal learning strategies not only keep costs down, they also enhance the chance of learning from other organisational members within the work environment. Keeping these experiences in-house, allows organisational members to effectively navigate changes in operations and achieve better performance.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND THEORISTS**

This study provides ample choices for how organisations, and in particular Malaysian organisations, human resource practitioners and academics can implement learning strategies. Most critical for those who want to improve
performance, save costs, time and energy is the need to adopt the most effective or “right” learning strategies for each individual organisation (Ni & Sun, 2009). It is paramount that each organisation adopts the learning strategy most suited to their situation and employees, regardless of whether they adopt active, participative, experiential, problem solving, coaching, mentoring and formal or informal learning.

Of more interest though, is that this study provides further evidence that organisational learning is being implemented in Malaysia, and is more widespread than was identified in a previous study by Arshad and Scott-Ladd (2008). Given the value other researchers have identified can be drawn from the application of organisational learning strategies (Armstrong, 2000; Schien, 1993; Senge, 1990), this should provide considerable choice for organisations seeking new strategies to adapt to the current economic climate.

Implementing change does require expensive training programs or the use of consultants. We are not denying that there is a place for these, but there is much an organisation can do internally. The first step is building a climate or culture, where learning is valued and supported. The evidence from this study supports Brown and Brudney’s (2003) argument that facilitating and allowing information and knowledge to be easily accessible from all directions (that is vertically, horizontally, and diagonally), is an effective way of building an organisation’s internal capacity.

Shared knowledge generates and develops core competencies in employees and the organisation, which
combines to make the organisation more competitive (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

This exploratory study provides a good foundation for future research. Further studies could investigate the organisational learning strategies being implemented in Malaysia in a number of different ways. For example, quantitative approach could explore and confirm the frequency of use of the various strategies and which settings they are most suited to. This study asked managers about their perceptions of the strategies implemented; however, employees may have different perspectives. Therefore, the impact on employees should also be investigated, particularly in relation to employee satisfaction, productivity, commitment and intent to turnover. Given Malaysia's status as an emerging economy, the influence of organisational learning on innovation could also be studied to identify the extent to which organisational learning enriches innovation and whether some strategies are more appropriate to Malaysia and others.

This study could also be expanded to increase the number of respondents and explore a wider range of industries. For example, this research involved four (4) industries; however, Malaysia has a very diverse range of industries, from plantations to banking, construction and education, and given the importance of situational contingencies, research needs to extend to other industries to create better generalisations of how organisational learning strategy can be implemented in Malaysia. An extension of this study across a wider scope would allow a better understanding of the strategies, processes and the outcomes being achieved.
Future studies could also examine the influence of different roles on OL. For example, the CEO or top manager positions mean they not only influence the choices made by the organisation, they also need access to information to evaluate the organisation’s progress or to implement new strategies. This means their information and understanding of issues needs to be reliable. Further research is needed to uncover how best their needs could be met. It would also be useful to conduct further studies across cross sections of organisations, to identify how effectively organisational learning strategy has been implemented at the operational level and to understand any changes achieved. Knowing and understanding these would give some indication of how organisational learning strategy contributes to performance, innovation and satisfaction within Malaysia.

This exploratory study is not without limitations. The first is that it is subjective in nature. Factors such as the respondents’ willingness, honesty and sincerity influence the reliability of the findings, as does their relationship to the rest of the organisation. Furthermore, organisational learning is a relatively new issue for Malaysia and, as became evident in the study, some managers had limited exposure to and understanding of organisational learning theory and struggled to define the concept, which may introduce some sample bias. The organisations that participated in this study were relatively large and some were engaged in international trade, which likely gives greater exposure to Western practices and ideals. It could also be that the wider community and in particular, small and family-owned businesses, or those who chose not to participate in the study, have a lesser understanding. Alternatively, considering the government has been active in promoting the need for
organisational learning, the understanding might be equally as high, or higher, in some sectors of the wider business community.

Another limitation, associated with the first, is that this study only explored the perceptions of respondents from four industries (Academic, Government, Health and Manufacturing). Different industries might be less or better informed. Similarly, there could be a bias within the industry groups depending on the knowledge of the individual participants in the study. In addition, while one could expect academics to have a better understanding of the theories of organisational learning, the industry practitioners’ conceptualisations are influenced by the need to apply the theory in a practical way. In addition, the overall results are influenced by the manufacturing respondents’ input, which might not be representative of their industry’s views, or understanding in other sectors across the community.

CONCLUSION
The concept of organisational learning is growing in importance as organisations try to discover the secrets of learning so they can understand how to learn and stay ahead of competitors. With mounting globalisation pressures and increasing engagement with international community, Malaysia manufacturers must brace themselves to adapt to the rapid changes especially in the current economic crisis globally and learn to stay competitive. The ability to become a learning organisation as defined by Arshad (2008), Williams (2001) and Garvin (1993) would help Malaysian organisations and serve as a vehicle to help Malaysia achieve its Vision 2020.
In terms of learning strategies practised in Malaysia, this study shows that organisations prefer internal learning strategies, but also use external learning strategies extensively. Both formal and informal methodologies are popular. The use of multi-sources to draw on various sources of learning, such as self-learning by reading, research, books, magazines, journals, publications and resource centres was common. External strategies such as attachment and exposure included job rotation, job positioning, visitations, and exhibitions, and although less common than the internal strategies was still consistently practised across the respondent groups. Similarly, seminars and conferences, experiential learning, brainstorming and dialogue were also popular learning strategies.

Some industries had different preferences, for example, the health organisations emphasised seminars and conferences, the manufacturing sector emphasised experiential learning, government departments focused more on attachment and exposure, whereas the academics relied more on self-learning; however, all respondents did use a mix of learning strategies.

One cause for concern was that some companies are not yet willing, or perhaps mature enough, to implement learning strategies that fully empower their employees. A small number of respondents still focus on task-related skill development, rather than recognising a more holistic approach that develops and empowers employees can add value through synergistic benefits.

The evidence presented here of how organisational learning is being successfully implemented within Malaysian
organisations should motivate other organisations to adopt similar practices, and provide guidance on how to implement learning strategies. Becoming a learning organisation within the Malaysian culture and environment is possible and there are many fruits to be harvested for those who can operationalise organisational learning strategies in practice.

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To assist with the anonymous refereeing process a separate title page should contain author(s), name(s), position(s) and organisation(s), full title of paper and abstract. The main text is to be arranged as follows:
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   - Acknowledgements

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Emphasis should be set in bold type.
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One and a half spacing.
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Each section should have a heading. These should not be numbered. First level headings should be set in bold in capitals, followed by one blank line and preceded by two blank lines. Second level headings should be set in bold, not capitalised, followed by one blank line and preceded by one blank line.

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No headers and footers. However, your paper should have page numbers pencilled lightly at the right bottom of each page.

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Keep to a minimum and place at end of main text.

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Number consecutively. Place as soon as possible after reference to table made in text. Title should be flush with the left margin and placed above the table in bold and lower case. For example:

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Camera ready copies of figures/charts should be provided.

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