

## 2. Content and Analysis

2.1 If you were a change agent, critically analyse and evaluate the type of change that was initiated by the CEO of Australian coal mine. As a change agent, decide which theory of change and leadership theory can be adopted to drive success in the case situation.

2.2 Critically explain and analyse the miners' general views that initiated change as:

- Threat to their occupational community
- Varied forces of implications for change resistance.

2.3 Prepare a Communication Plan for continuous change management for both employees and managerial performance at the Australian coal mine. Present the plan in tabular form with textual explanation. (Follow the

3. At least 15 references not older than 2006 from varied sources.

### Case:

#### Resistance to Threatened Identities: Unexpected Reactions to Orthodox Change by Peter Maclean and Patrick Dawson

A case study analysis of the introduction of a new system for appraising worker performance in an Australian coal mine is used to explore resistance and change. The change was initiated by the chief executive officer, who decided, without consultation that a performance management system would be

introduced for all underground coal miners and gave directions to middle managers to implement the change. A senior HR Manager at one of the collieries was co-opted to direct the implementation of the project throughout the division. He canvassed the views of mine managers on the topic and then conducted a search in other industries for a performance management system that he could appropriate for service at the coal mines within his jurisdiction. An appraisal system in use in a steel works in another city in Australia became the template from which he selected rating categories and descriptors for use at all the multinational's collieries, including Glenrothes, featured in this case. In essence, what was implemented was not a complete performance management system but rather a simple appraisal rating scheme without any direct links to pay, performance, or other HRM-related outcomes.

### **Employee Resistance to a Managerially Imposed Performance Appraisal System**

Unexpectedly, vehement resistance from coal miners occurred even before the first round of appraisals. Miners refused to participate in the appraisal process until forced to do so by the Industrial Relations Commission, which ruled that performance appraisal was a legitimate managerial prerogative. Miners then insisted on their right to have a union official accompany them during their performance review meetings. Management responded by insisting that an HR Manager accompany the reviewer at these meetings. Review meetings averaged over two hours in length as miners argued over their scores on each of the performance criteria. There were massive resource implications, and disruptions to shift crews and productivity in general, in having four men tied up in every single protracted review. The introduction of comparative performance ratings was followed by shock waves after the first round of performance reviews. Workforce morale plummeted and performance slumped. Relationships among all of the parties involved in the appraisal process were severely strained. Above-ground managers over time came to realise that they were fighting a battle in



which performance was the loser, but they could not understand why an orthodox HRM practice should cause such difficulties.

Miners fought against each stage of the implementation process. For example, the impasse between managers and miners occasioned some 10 appearances before the Industrial Relations Commission, where the parties needed outside legal intervention over even the minutiae of the wording of the performance review categories. The company was faced with a dilemma. Why, in the absence of the traditional HR levers of positive or punitive consequences, were miners so passionately opposed to performance reviews? What forces – historical, contextual, political or otherwise – were driving such resistance? Why did employee morale deteriorate after the intervention? The apparent “irrationality” of blue-collar worker response to appraisal clearly raised questions about what managers believed was a legitimate HRM intervention strategy.

Essentially, the new performance management system assigned ratings that were at odds with individual and group expectations and demonstrated little understanding of the occupational culture and shared work practices of miners. Miners were offended at being brought into a review meeting where pre-set scores were placed before them. Raters had received instructions that they were not to negotiate over scores and as a result, heated arguments broke out over the ratings, but at the end of the day the miners were excluded from influencing the final score. This they deeply resented, as the following miner’s comments illustrate:

The problem I had with it (the rating process) was that before you went into that room they had already worked out what you were (your score). That’s the biggest issue I had with it. You were rated before you go in there and no matter what you say, they are not changing your rating!  
(Longwall operator 3).

Some of the stories that emerged position miners as the victims of a long history of managerial injustice. One such example from an old-timer demonstrates this mode of storytelling. Here the miner bemoans the erosion of working conditions which they had fought so hard to win, yet claims the real problem is lack of a managerial respect for their workers.



I think the coal mining industry, compared to what we used to have, has been already wrecked. We fought and went on strike to get the conditions we have now – hours, conditions and so on. (Now) they're taking it all back (from us).

The violation miners describe is not just that conditions are being encoded. More importantly, in the context of this interview, miners feel the appraisal process confirms their fears that they are being used and abused. They position themselves as the "city rags" of management, rather than as dignified miners who are respected and appreciated.<sup>4</sup> In this account, considerable identity work is being performed to redress what they see as the undermining of their worth by the appraisal process. Not only miners feel that their pays and benefits were being encoded. Some miners expressed concerns with safety. Recounting sources of ratings rewarded workers who cut corners with safety. Recounting stories of rating injustices involving safety breaches was an effective discursive device in garnering workmate and union support:

We got some blokes – we got one fella there – you got no idea how he works, but he's downright dangerous! They are saying, "hey look at all the work he's doing", but they, he hasn't killed himself, let alone anyone else, that's a miracle! He cuts all the corners and they love him!

(Interview 47, longwall miner 11).

The appeal to safety concerns in this account also serves as a legitimating device. These "war stories" told by miners served a number of purposes: they positioned miners as undeserving victims; they help make sense of what, to miners, was an intrinsically flawed system; and they apportioned blame away from themselves towards a (sometimes) malevolent management. They also highlight the injustice of judgments by those deemed as "outside" of the occupational community of miners who work together in the mine.

One of the miners, with considerable pleasure told the story of how he had argued with his manager with his appraisal and demanded an increase in his appraisal score. He felt quite heroic when his assertiveness was rewarded:

We they printed me this score, and the first time I saw it, and the first time I saw it, I threw it across the table at my boss and said, "You're completely out of touch! This is not correct. This is wrong here what you've got here.



You contradict yourself. You say one thing here; (now) look at this (points to document) two pages later.

I said "You owe me five points here...He listened to about three of them and he said, "Stop! Stop! I'll give you two."

And he liquid papered two in front of me.....and he changed them and said, "is that ok?"  
And I said, "That will do."

I felt like it was a game – the liquid paper thing – "Ok, I'll make you a B". It's bullshit. It's not a proper evaluation. Not by a long shot!

(Interview 24, coal clearance electrician 2)

The majority of tales at Glenrothes Colliery were in the context of men risking their lives for each other in the difficult conditions underground. Qualities of courage, loyalty and mate ship are what gave meaning to their working lives. These qualities were essential elements in their shared identities as miners. Anger was generated against those who challenged these heroic qualities, especially when the source is a misinformed "tea-sipping management" whose members rarely ventured underground.

### **Reconfiguring Performance: Miners' Reactive Adjustments to Change**

Consistently, miners at Glenrothes interpreted appraisal as a critical, judgmental message from dominant coalitions of accountants and managerial "others" that they needed to "lit their game." They conversed among themselves about the negatives of the appraisal messages; managers often commented about how miners completely missed the positives in their messages and just dwelt on the negatives. Given the breaches of identity occasioned by the appraisal message, miners employed "war stories" of appraisals as a form of subversion and resistance. One electrician, for example, told the following story about himself:

I hate to say this – it's probably being very negative – but I looked at the chaps that scored higher than me (and thought), if that's what they want. I will be more like them, and I have believe it or not – don't put my name to this – but I have *slackened off* because I realize that's what they want you to work "smarter not harder" so, OK, I will play their little game.



This electrician stories himself as the victim of negative appraisal, an undeserving recipient, unfairly criticized for exerting extra effort to get more work done. By simple cause and effect logic, he now constructs himself in a defensive position as one not caring about the work (bad luck!), but at the same he justifies his approach, as revealed by his preamble to the story (I hate to say this and believe it or not....and having to play their little game). On another occasion a miner recounted how he had been "marked down" because he had taken time off twice during the last year due to illness. He was particularly galled because previously he had not taken a day off in four years yet his previous track record was disregarded.

In our analyses of miners' stories what is interesting is how what was seen as a fairly orthodox change resulted in unexpected reactions from miners. Managers failed to understand the importance of work practices and the culture in creating and sustaining miner identities and the legitimating of existing relations between managers and workers. The prerogative of managers to manage was used to legitimate managerial action and through endorsement by the Industrial Relations Commission, further isolated miners and generated distrust and resentment. Miners viewed this imposition as an assault on their dignity and an affront to their identities as miners. In their eyes, this formal legitimization of management had broken normative expectations and delegitimized existing working relationships. A clear divide was articulated between 'us' and 'them' and the legitimacy of above-ground managers to rate accomplishments underground was questioned. In other words, whilst the legitimacy of management was formally endorsed it was no longer accepted by miners who questioned their competency and viewed managerial evaluations as subjective, discriminatory, lacking substance (being based on limited understanding of what work individuals actually did) and reeking of favouritism. Miners saw the absurdity of individual ratings in what is essentially an integrated team operation. To provide some members of a crew with good ratings while excluding other members of the same crew performing the same work seemed at odds with the realities of the job.



You got the methane drainage blokes – two of them sat on the drilling rig year after year. One done [sic] the driving, the next day the other bloke done the driving, the other bloke done the drilling. And this bloke got an A and he got a C. It was just insane!

[Development panel miner #4]

### **Conclusion: Resistance to Change in Context**

The identities of miners are formed, developed and revised within a broader community context of what it means to be a miner (occupational communities) as well as within local work environments (the workplace culture associated with mining activities at Dover Colliery). We have sought to demonstrate how new change initiatives, even those accepted as part of orthodox change, can have seriously negative consequences on employees when applied without a careful consideration of the historical, political and social contexts in which employees develop their sense of worth in the workplace. These managerially imposed performance ratings severely violated miners' pre-existing occupational identity. Whether intentional or not, these appraisals threatened to accomplish what Knights (1990:311) terms the individualization of the worker. Transgressions against miners' identities set off a complex set of reactions in which miners' stories of the appraisal process provide insight into their emotional states and the coping mechanisms they brought into service to defend their identities from the unwelcome interventions of management. We illustrate how an analysis of miners' stories sheds light on how stories were used as a way of channeling discontent into defiance. Spaces for resistance to identity regulation were prised open through these emergent strategies which miners employed to combat attempts to manage the culture of the Dover Colliery. For example, some of the stories which miners told, especially those highlighting managerial incompetence, provided a key source of resistance. Perpetrators of identity violations received their comeuppance as miners appropriated their methods to turn the tables back on them. Indeed, much of the rough talk and masculine humour observed during mine visits was at the expense of above-ground managers. Miners' masculine humour was strategically employed against managers in the ongoing struggle over appraisal. As Mumby (2004:244', emphasis in original) observes,

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'organizational storytelling is a discursive site *par excellence* for the critical analysis of the dialectic of control and resistance', and as our analyses highlights, stories were used to resist and reconstitute identities legitimization battles between managers and workers.