Decentralised Human Resource Management: Work and Employment Relations within Two Parks of the NSW Public Sector.

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential for contradictions to result from the decentralisation of human resource management strategy to line management within two parks of the New South Wales public sector. The paper examines the impact of decentralised human resource management upon work relations, the organisation of work processes and the level of technology utilised, and employment relations, communications, performance assessment, career path progression and training. The argument of this paper is that contradictions and inconsistencies within work and employment relations result from the devolution of responsibility to line management within both parks.
Introduction

This paper examines the impact of a human resource management strategy to decentralise responsibility to line managers within two parks of the New South Wales public sector. The human resource management strategy being examined involves the implementation of the Parks and Gardens Horticultural and Ranger Staff Enterprise Agreement registered on 16 June 1993. This study concentrates on horticultural workers covered by this agreement within both parks. Human resource management is predominantly presented as a strategic management activity requiring the development of a number of human resource policies which cohere with one another and which collectively can be integrated within the organisation's overall business strategy (Boxall and Dowling, 1990; Gardener and Palmer, 1993). Decentralising responsibility to line management is consistent with human resource management as all managers, and not solely personnel, are provided with responsibility for the management of labour and are expected to be committed to implementing the organisation's labour/management strategy (Legge, 1989). However, the potential for decentralised human resource management to result in inconsistent and contradictory approaches to the management of labour by line managers is often overlooked.

Decentralised human resource management on work and employment relations is explored within two parks; Karri and Jarrah. Work relations examines the impact of decentralised responsibility to supervisors upon the organisation of work and attempts by line management to introduce multi-skilling. Employment relations examines management/labour communications, performance assessment, training and career path progression.
The paper is structured as follows. First, a literature review justifies the theoretical framework adopted. Second, changes in the organisation of work at Karri and Jarrah are examined. Third, changes in employment relations at both parks are explored. Finally, a conclusion is provided which draws together the main themes discussed.

The data gathering process involved a number of semi-structured interviews with line management in both parks, the Public Service Association industrial officer, and Public Service Association delegates and horticultural workers within each park. In total three interviews were held with management, one with the Public Service Association industrial officer and four with Public Service Association delegates and horticultural workers. These interviews were conducted on two occasions, in August of 1993 and during July and August 1994. As such, this case study aims to explore the longitudinal evolution of work and employment relations within both parks rather than provide solely a 'snap shot' view of either organisation (Lansbury and Macdonald, 1992, p.22).
Decentralised Human Resource Management: strategy and contradiction

"The contradictory role of management as both co-ordinator of a complex and often baffling productive operation, and simultaneously a vehicle of discipline and disruption, is almost inevitably reflected in consequential contradictions both between and within the various managerial specialisms. Only if this is recognised is it possible meaningfully to investigate the nature, dynamics and preconditions of management strategy in industrial relations". (Hyman, 1987, p. 35)

Contradictions within management strategy represent a major explanation for the often ambiguous impact of labour management practices. The management/labour relationship begins with the purchase by management of an uncertain 'commodity'. Through an exchange contract management purchases labour power: the potential to work, rather than actual labour or a pre determined level of output (Gospel, 1992, p. 2-3; Batstone et al, 1984, p. 2). Converting labour power into labour, however, represents a perpetual conundrum for management (Gospel, 1992, 2-3) who cannot be as confident of the productivity of its labour 'commodity' compared to other factors of production. Overcoming this uncertainty requires management to develop "structures of control" over employees within the workplace (Littler and Salaman, 1982). These control structures are themselves uncertain because of the potential for workers to resist. For instance, a direct control strategy (Friedman, 1977) may be undermined by the tacit skills of workers (Manwaring and Wood, 1985). Therefore, the management/labour relationship has a dual nature and is as much premised on cooperation as control (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980) as management seeks to generate the commitment of labour whilst simultaneously subordinating workers to management control (Burawoy, 1985).
This dichotomy is evident within the management literature where management is often presented with two conflicting choices. On the one hand management may adopt a consensual approach and treat labour as a resource to be maximised or, alternately, implement strict supervision treating labour as a cost to be minimised (Gospel, 1992). Human relations theorists such as McGregor (1960) differentiate between Theory X, where workers' "inherent dislike of work" requires stringent control by management, and theory Y, where management attempts to satisfy labour's supposed hierarchy of needs. Labour process theorists such as Friedman (1977) differentiate between direct control through strict supervision and responsible autonomy, where workers are provided with considerable discretion over their labour process. Post fordist commentators divide management into neo-fordism, where direct control, deskillling and an intensification of labour are commonplace, and post-fordism, where the use of flexible technology requires highly skilled and motivated employees (Mathews, 1989). Similarly, human resource management oscillates between 'soft' and 'hard' models. The 'soft' model emphasises the treatment of employees as 'valued assets' to be developed while the 'hard' highlights the commodity status of labour and focuses on management strategies of cost minimisation (Legge, 1989). Guest (1987, p.505) argues that human resource management "is a subtle blend of some of the 'best' elements of scientific management and human relations. Although superficially similar to McGregor's (1960) Theory Y, the focus on the individual worker, on goals, on careful selection and training are all closer to elements of scientific management associated with Theory X". As with other management strategies, human resource management contains the internal contradiction of seeking to generate employee commitment whilst simultaneously requiring labour to be subordinate to management control.

This does not imply that management is incapable of implementing a coherent approach towards labour. Whatever the difficulties of putting policy into practice, however inconsistent, pragmatic, opportunistic or un-
coordinated management may appear (Marginson et al, 1988; Pursell and Sisson, 1983; Rose and Jones, 1985; Kramar, 1992), it remains possible for some element of strategy, however obscure, to emerge (Mintzberg, 1978; Batestone et al, 1984; Gospel, 1992).

Considerable attention has been devoted to develop typologies to explain management strategies to control labour (Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977; Burawoy, 1979). These typologies, however, tend to either underplay the diversity of management attempts to control labour (Storey, 1985) or are inadequate when taken out of their original context. For example, while Edward's bureaucratic control may be appropriate to management strategy in the United States, some alteration is necessary before it can be applied in other countries which traditionally experience a higher density of workplace trade union organisation (Gospel, 1983, p. 12). Therefore, instead of attempting to develop the ideal explanatory typology it may be more useful to focus on both the conundrums and possibilities presented to management over time and the diversity of strategies adopted in response to them (Gospel, 1983). To facilitate this process, this paper makes partial use of Gospel's (1983) framework which seeks to highlight the diversity of management approaches towards labour by dividing management strategy into three "strategic areas"; work, employment, and industrial relations. Work relations examines the social and technical organisation of work, while employment relations concentrates upon remuneration, training, recruitment and communications between management and labour. Industrial relations examines management/trade union relations and bargaining. Industrial relations, for the purposes of this study, involved the negotiation of the Parks and Gardens Enterprise Agreement in June 1993 (O'Donnell, 1994). This paper focuses upon line managements' approach to the implementation of this enterprise agreement and its impact on work and employment relations within both parks.
The Structural Context of Both Parks

Karri dates from 1887 when it was created to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the colony of New South Wales. The park covers some 365 hectares of open parkland and attracts in excess of four million visitors each year. It contains equestrian and cycling tracks, a large number of playing fields and, within a smaller park recently amalgamated within Karri, a golf course and an athletics stadium. The appointment of a Director at Karri has increased the authority of leading hands (supervisors) by devolving responsibility for budgeting and planning the day to day operation of the Park to this level of line management (Director, Karri, 1993). This authority is constrained by the increasing pressure from the New South Wales government for the park to reduce its reliance on government revenue. This pressure requires the smaller park within Karri to become self-funding, putting greater pressures on line management to become more entrepreneurial in their approach to the operations of the garden. The redevelopment of the golf course has aided workplace management's push towards self-funding.

Karri also derives considerable revenue from car parking, particularly when events take place in the football stadium or the Royal showground. Management is also examining marketing opportunities and the possibility of commercially leasing some of the park's buildings (Manager, Karri, 1994). However, self-funding has also required greater attention to cost cutting by Karri management - in particular labour costs. For example, field crews at the smaller park and Karri have amalgamated but 10 fewer garden labourers carry out the same duties previously undertaken by these two crews (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1993).

Jarrah was officially opened to the public on 1 January 1988. It is still undergoing construction and contains 40 hectares of parkland and a further 60 hectares of mangrove swamp within which approximately 30 endangered
species of bird live. Until April 1993 the park functioned autonomously as a section of the Department of the Environment before both parks were amalgamated to form the Urban Parks Agency on 1 June 1993. The introduction of the Urban Parks Agency resulted in changes in the management structure at Jarrah, including the appointment of a new manager. The old foreman/leading hand position also received a new job title (assistant manager field services) and became office bound, spending less time than previously in the field (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1994). The former manager at Jarrah argues that the Urban Parks Agency may have undesirable consequences for the financial independence of Jarrah. It may enable Karri to tap the relatively comfortable funding arrangement provided for Jarrah, to provide the revenue to replace old infrastructure at Karri such as buildings and sewers which urgently require repair.

The current budget arrangements at Jarrah may provide some justification for these fears. Under the Urban Parks Agency Jarrah is now subject to yearly budget cutbacks. At present this involves a 3 per cent cut each year for the next three years. To date this has not resulted in any job losses at Jarrah. However, the workforce believes that management plans to contract out the horticultural side of the gardens operations. Indeed, one member of the horticultural workforce has been approached informally with a job offer by one prospective contractor (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1994).
Work Relations at Karri

Work relations within Karri concentrates on the impact of the decentralisation of responsibility to supervisors and multi-skilling on the organisation of work at this park.

Work relations at Karri examines the extent of job rotation and multi-skilling. Little job rotation occurs at Karri. Horticultural workers are divided into three areas: horticulture (consisting of four gardeners and three garden labourers); Turf (responsible for mowing and consisting of five garden labourers); and waste management (five labourers). An aborist (tree surgeon) and aborist assistant work independently of these sections. Horticultural workers tend to be assigned permanently to one section with little movement between areas. Management argues that they are in the early phases of multi-skilling the horticultural workforce but concedes that a detailed division of labour has traditionally persisted within the park. Management insists that greater job rotation is being introduced to avoid having garden labourers collecting litter five days a week for ten months of the year. Therefore, during the different seasons of the year garden labourers will be 'multi-skilled' to enable them to undertake a greater range of duties. Management also aims to have garden labourers trained in arboriculture. This requires them to be trained in the use of the chipper and chain saw and to be an observer on the ground for the aborist. This program has been implemented slowly, extending solely to garden labourers in the turf management area to date. Management also requires all garden labourers to be trained in mowing duties and to be familiar with the safe use of mowing equipment. The park encompasses 365 hectares and the majority of maintenance work undertaken by garden labourers involves mowing. Other tasks undertaken by garden labourers at Karri include litter control, paper stabbing and assisting qualified trade staff such as the gardeners, plumber or carpenter in their duties (Manager, Karri, 1994).
Multi-skilling appears to have had little impact at Karri to date. The enterprise agreement provides that Level 3 Garden Labourers will:

a) Work under minimal supervision and therefore be required to exercise limited individual judgement in following instructions; and

b) Perform work processes of limited complexity (such as framework, concrete finishing, bitumening, soil mixing, potting) using equipment of limited complexity (such as chainsaws, soil mixing and pasteurising equipment, tractors, vehicles up to 2 tonne, ride-on mowers, street sweepers) requiring detailed training but not requiring special licences; (Parks and Gardens Enterprise Agreement, 1993, p. 7).

Only a limited range of tasks remain available to garden labourers at Karri. Garden labourers within the Turf section of the park remain restricted to three main duties, namely mowing, paper stabbing, and lake clearing (Garden labourers Karri, 1993). Even this narrow range of duties has been further reduced with the mechanisation of mowing functions. Two garden labourers now operate mowing tractors permanently, performing no other duties. This trend toward a declining rather than increasing range of duties contradicts the aims of the enterprise agreement for workers at this level.

The reaction of garden labourers to this routine is mixed. For some these limited and repetitive duties are clearly monotonous (Public Service Association Industrial Officer, 1994). Other garden labourers accustomed to this routine would be resistant to suggestions that they rotate sections and undertake other duties. One garden labourer has worked within the turf section for 20 years and another for 15 and neither would wish to change areas (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1994).
Garden labourers within the waste management section enjoy a wider range of duties. Of the three garden labourers in this area one operates a backhoe and two drive trucks. As well as undertaking duties within waste management, they work closely with the aborist, gardeners and plumbers. Also, the backhoe operator has considerable discretion in his day to day decision-making, with his judgement often accepted by the team leader, although the other horticultural labourers in waste management have little autonomy. These horticultural labourers are provided with little responsibility or discretion over the maintenance of the equipment which they operate because maintenance is undertaken by mechanics. This extends to even minor repairs such as replacing a flat tyre, oil changes, or fixing or replacing wipers (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1994).

Work Relations at Jarrah

Work relations at Jarrah examines the degree of workforce flexibility within the park, worker autonomy, the level of technology utilised and the impact of decentralisation of responsibility upon the labour processes of gardeners and garden labourers.

Considerable workforce flexibility and little demarcation exists at Jarrah. Garden labourers resemble a polyvalent or multi-tasked workforce because of the wide range of tasks undertaken. These tasks range from paper stabbing, mowing and barbecue cleaning, to constructing a bird hide, environment centre and walkway through the mangroves, installation of irrigation and sub-soil drainage, the operation of bobcat machinery and trucks by those with the relevant licences, to dressing up as the park pelican for opening days and the Royal Easter show! (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1993).
A number of factors explain this flexibility. First, Garden Labourers avoid mowing by informally agreed allocation of a substantial portion of this mundane task to two partially intellectually impaired persons. Paper stabbing is minimised by allowing litter to be blown along the fence line that dissect the park rather than wandering on foot in pursuit as occurs in other parks. Second, variety is maintained due to the relative newness of the park and its ongoing construction. This factor is amplified by mistakes made by the Department of Public Works in the construction of the park's infrastructure and by the incorrect planting of many of the initial flora by the landscape designer. The result is an almost limitless plethora of duties to be undertaken. Garden labourers also enjoy considerable autonomy and control over their work. At the beginning of each week tasks are listed on a blackboard with a name attached to each task. In executing these tasks workers frequently co-ordinate the use of equipment amongst themselves and undertake jobs with little direct supervision. Garden labourers prefer this variety and autonomy to what they perceive as excessive 'pigeon-holing' or division of labour at other parks where, they say, labourers are limited to either paper stabbing or mowing. The horticultural workforce are keen to avoid the monotonous routines by maintaining the lack of demarcation and flexibility that exists at Jarrah (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1993).

As far as management is concerned this lack of demarcation ensures a more flexible workforce. For example gardeners always open the park. This would be unheard of at Karri. Management believes that this flexibility offers substantial benefits to the horticultural workforce in terms of job enrichment (Manager, Jarrah, 1993). Garden labourers, however, point to contradictions between the benefits of employee autonomy and discretion and the arduous nature of work at Jarrah. And cost constraints have led to complaints by garden labourers of understaffing at the park. They argue that there is too much work to be done for the number labourers employed. Furthermore, the ratio of potential supervisors is high with six garden
labourers overseen by one manager, one assistant manager (Field Services), a leading hand, and two gardeners (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1993).

The decentralisation of human resource management at Jarrah results in more work pressure and greater responsibility being thrust upon garden labourers and gardeners. Two gardeners at level five are now responsible for the activities of the park's workforce in the field and take greater responsibility for writing reports and preparing submissions. But, they constantly find their decisions being overridden by more senior levels in the park's management hierarchy and in reality have minimal input into managerial decision-making (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1994). Furthermore, line management has a tendency to apportion blame to horticultural workers (and away from themselves) if any mistakes are made in relation to the maintenance of the park. This happens less to garden labourers whose more standardised procedures for mowing or bob cat operations means that they are less open to such criticism (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1994). Therefore, decentralisation of responsibility to line management at Jarrah means more work pressure, greater responsibility, little decision-making power and the likelihood of being blamed for any problems that occur for the horticultural workforce.

**Employment Relations within Karri**

Employment relations at Karri explores line management's approach to communications with horticultural staff, performance assessment, career paths, training and study leave.

Management at Karri seeks to foster greater morale amongst field staff. The divisional manager organises monthly meetings with supervisors and team leaders. Issues canvassed at these meetings include problems with
staff and financial and operational issues. The divisional manager argues that team leaders have to be well informed about both their unit and the wider context of the operation of the park to enable them to develop a sense of "ownership". After these meetings, team leaders have meetings with their units and through this process information is communicated 'down the line'. Management organises a barbecue one Friday a month, which office staff are encouraged to attend, with workers finishing at 2.30 pm instead of 3.30 pm. On one occasion the landscape architect displayed plans of anticipated changes to the park (Manager, Karri, 1994). Furthermore, management hold monthly meetings with field staff to keep them informed and encourage them to feel part of the organisation. On the whole, horticultural workers consider these innovations to be successful, improving both communications between management and horticultural workers and morale. Horticultural workers prefer to be part of the organisation and do not want to be treated like cogs in a machine (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1994). However, the Director is aware that suspicion towards management remains and blames this on a breakdown in communications at middle management level (Director, Karri, 1993).

Perceived indiscretions by management against individual workers over career path progression, study leave, and ongoing problems in communicating with senior management, contradict line managements' strategy to improve the commitment of the horticultural workforce at Karri.

Career progression at Karri has been limited to date. While labourers may progress to Level 4 if they have access to duties which require special licences (for example for driving a bobcat or truck) access to such duties is at the discretion of leading hands, with control over career progression reinforcing the ability of leading hands to exercise control over garden labourers. Under the old agreement labourers received an allowance for truck driving duties for the period actually engaged in this work - even one day's duration. Under the enterprise agreement labourers must be
employed to drive a truck for five consecutive days to be entitled to payment at level 4. However this seldom, if ever, occurs. Garden labourers within the turf section remarked that it was a "funny thing" that somehow they are never allocated the required five consecutive days of driving, but find themselves reallocated to mowing or other duties on the fourth of fifth day. Furthermore, they have been informed by their immediate supervisors that to qualify for a promotion they must be willing to demonstrate 'enthusiasm' and 'flexibility' and this includes undertaking truck driving duties. These garden labourers have largely accepted this outcome as a price worth paying to relieve the monotony of constant paper stabbing (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1993).

Management also appears to be reluctant to progress suitably qualified staff. For instance, the arborist's assistant has recently qualified as an arborist. He is also licensed to drive any of the trucks in use throughout the park. Such qualifications would appear to indicate that he should progress to Level 4 or possibly Level 5 of the enterprise agreement. However, he remains on Level 3. One example of progression between level 3-4 is that of the backhoe driver in the waste management section who was recruited initially at level 3.

Contradictions are also evident in management's approach to performance assessment. After the first year of the enterprise agreement field staff were entitled to an increment. However, this increment is linked to a performance review. Many workers were surprised to find that they had been unsuccessful in receiving this increment. It transpired that management had withheld it from workers with five or more unsubstantiated sick days who instead received an interview by management regarding their "attitude" (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1994). Horticultural workers contend that many of the more productive workers were among those adjudged to have excessive sick leave, resulting in performance assessment potentially leading to a
deterioration in the productivity of the horticultural workforce at Karri (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1994).

On top of this, management overlooked the enterprise agreement's requirement that an assessment committee be formed to review those who were refused the increment. This committee is supposed to be formed "where the assessing officers recommend not to approve the officer's progression" and staff had to be notified "by the Director or the Director's nominee of any decision to defer payment of an increment" (Parks and Gardens Enterprise Agreement, 1993, p. 14-15). This failure to comply with the contents of the enterprise agreement has further undermined morale and exacerbated staff frustration towards management (Garden Labourers, Karri, 1994). Management concedes that the performance appraisal could have been handled differently. They admit a number of workers were counselled on non-performance issues and had their increment withheld but insist that this experience was limited to roughly half a dozen individual cases (Manager, Karri, 1994).

Contradictions are also apparent in management's approach to training and study leave at Karri. The field staff induction manual notes that "All employees are encouraged to progress to their full capabilities and staff are encouraged to increase their qualifications for the work which they do. Time off and payment of fees may be granted to attend approved training courses" (Urban Parks Agency, Induction Manual, 1994). However, the horticultural workforce at Karri state that although they are able to apply for truck licences, payment for licences are occasionally refused for no particular reason. One field worker's initial request for his motor bike licence to be paid was initially accepted but when the receipt for the licence was presented management refused to pay. While a minor matter (the licence costing only $28) it resulted in a considerable deterioration in goodwill towards management (Garden labourers, Karri, 1994).
Similarly, management's approach to study leave is inconsistent. The induction manual encourages staff to apply for study leave where "The course... will improve and/or assist the officer's ability to perform duties required as part of their position held at the time of making application" (Urban Parks Agency, Induction Manual, 1994). While one garden labourer received study leave for undertaking a personnel management course, a supervisor, also wishing to undertake a management course, was refused. The end result is uncertainty about why certain individuals are successful and others not. There is a collective solidarity amongst the workforce nurtured through sharing a common lunch room (which all except 3 female horticultural workers share). As a result, word of transgressions against individual workers spread quickly with comments such as "typical management" and "they're doing it again" commonplace. Horticultural workers note that management appears to be unaware of the detrimental impact on morale their actions against individual workers have.

Employment Relations: Jarrah

Employment relations at Jarrah includes an examination of training, career paths, job evaluation and the remuneration of the horticultural workforce.

Training at Jarrah for garden labourers has been extensive. Being a new park Jarrah possesses relatively up to date technology and equipment. It has modern irrigation systems and its record collections are computerised on a database. Gardeners undertake reports and prepare submissions using word processing systems. The park also has its own computer aided design software to enable it to do its own improvements to landscaping (Manager, Jarrah, 1993). In 1993 the training budget was $19,000 resulting in garden labourers being trained to operate bob cats and front end loaders. In return management expected these employees to remain for at least six months so that the park received some value for its training investment.
Management also encourages horticultural workers to attend technical and further education institutions and conferences on issues related to the maintenance of the park such as irrigation and water usage. Park management also maintains a library of training videos covering issues such as safe lifting techniques and supervisory training for leading hands (Former Manager, Jarrah, 1993).

However, there is little or no career path potential for garden labourers at Jarrah. Most labourers are on level 3 or level 4 of the enterprise agreement - the latter the highest level for these horticultural workers. Those labourers who have licences to operate plant and equipment were moved to level 4. The only way that labourers can progress from level 3 to level 4 is if a vacancy exists for a plant operator. Also, level 4 garden labourers have no career path available to them unless they meet the criteria for gardener. As a result the levels of the agreement fail to provide sufficient scope to progress staff at Jarrah. This provides little incentive for existing level four labourers to look after equipment diligently (Former Manager, Jarrah, 1993).

Job evaluation at Jarrah has stalled. The horticultural workforce at Jarrah undertook an accredited course in job evaluation and wrote their own job descriptions. However, job evaluation has come to a grinding halt with the amalgamation of both parks into the Urban Parks Agency. Management insists that this process was a practice run and the workforce will have to go through it again, but not until Karri has completed its job evaluation. Little progress on job evaluation has occurred at Karri to date (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1994).

All but two intellectually impaired garden labourers received the yearly increment available under the enterprise agreement. These horticultural workers were knocked back after being assessed as being unable to adequately fulfil the requirements of the position (Garden Labourers, Jarrah, 1994). This is a ominous example of the potential impact of the enterprise
bargaining process on the ability of the intellectually impaired to maintain their wage parity with their able bodied colleagues as, under the individual assessment procedures of the Parks and Gardens enterprise agreement, they appear more vulnerable than would be the case if they had the protection of award coverage.

Conclusion

Elements of line management strategy towards horticultural workers is evident at both Karri and Jarrah. Management claims to be introducing multi-skilling, job rotation and career path progression in line with the contents of an enterprise agreement covering horticultural workers at both parks. But the implementation of these strategies highlights contradictions in both work and employment relations which constrain their effectiveness and ensure the continuance of low morale and resentment amongst the horticultural workforce towards idiosyncratic managerial decision-making.

Contradictions arise at Karri where line management's employment relations strategy to increase the commitment of the horticultural workforce clashes with authoritarian and inconsistent workplace labour management practices. Attempts to improve communications between management and labour through monthly meetings and a monthly barbecue are contradicted by the inconsistent approach adopted by management towards performance assessment. Management also appears to adopt an inconsistent approach towards training, with staff having little insight into the criteria used to assess applications for study leave. At Jarrah, while training as plant operators is available to garden labourers, minimal career progression exists.
Park managements' approach to work relations also demonstrates contradictions in the management of horticultural workers. The enterprise agreement outlines an extensive range of duties for horticultural labourers. At Karri, however, some garden labourers are limited to paper stabbing and litter collection. The introduction of mechanised mowers has further reduced their task diversity, while the decentralisation of responsibility to leading hands has increased the level of direct control exercised over them by supervisors.

Line management's approach to work relations at Jarrah results in horticultural staff having access to the latest in gardening technology. They are also provided with a considerable variety of tasks to perform. However, it is a moot point whether this represents multi-skilling or multi-tasking as horticultural staff are presently under considerable work pressure. Furthermore, the decentralisation of responsibility results in the horticultural workforce becoming the scapegoat for any mistakes made in the field. Overall, the evidence presented in this case study demonstrates the potential for a decentralised human resource management strategy to result in an inconsistent and contradictory approach to the management of labour by line managers and supports Hyman's (1987, p.30) observation that "...there is no 'one best way' of managing these contradictions, only different routes to partial failure."²
Endnotes


2. This case study of decentralised human resource management within two parks is unrepresentative and possibly atypical. However, such unrepresentativeness and atypicality represent major strengths of case study research and are invaluable in the process of developing and building theory (Mitchell, 1983).
References


Interviews conducted within the Parks and Gardens during August 1993 and June 1994

Management
Former Manager, Jarrah; Director, Karri; Manager, Karri

Horticultural Workforce
Garden labourers, Karri and Jarrah.