

The Living Experience of Emotions and Workplace Learning:

A Relational View

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Abstract

In academic literature the interplay between emotions and workplace learning is a largely neglected topic which, this thesis argues, is nonetheless very important in order to better understand both phenomena. Indeed learning and emotions are vital and pervasive aspects of individual and organisational life, and their interplay appears to have considerable social importance. Thus, the thesis challenges the over-rational portrayal of organisational life, arguing that emotions are key pointers to human learning, and the denial of emotions is the denial of learning. By taking a relational view, derived from a hermeneutical-pragmatist research approach, the thesis argues that emotions and learning are powerful sources of meaning and direction, supporting or inhibiting individuals and organisations in their attempts to re-define reality and find their place in it (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001).

The study uses interviews and observation to examine the interplay between emotions and learning in a professional workplace setting. It aims to contribute to knowledge developing this complex connection, exploring how learning and emotions are experienced by human resource development professionals at the micro-level of their day-to-day practices, in the context of the socio-cultural processes of their working life. The empirical data indicate that emotions and workplace learning are contextual, embodied and relational phenomena. They also indicate that these phenomena are essential elements of our being-in-the-world, that is of our living and changing (becoming), and of our being intertwined in socio-cultural contexts. Thus, this thesis contributes to the scholarly literature on the interplay between emotions and workplace learning, and establishes a relational understanding of how such phenomena can be elements of constructing human resource development professionals' emergent and complex identities at work.

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Statement of Originality

The accompanying thesis submitted for the degree of PhD entitled “**The Living Experience of Emotions and Workplace Learning: A Relational View**” is based on work conducted by the author, as a part-time student, in the Department of School of Management at the University of Leicester, mainly during the period October 2007 and September 2012.

All the work recorded in this thesis is original unless otherwise acknowledged in the text or by references. None of the work has been submitted for another degree in this or any other University.

Signed Paolo Cassai

Date 21/3/2012

Statement of Consent for British Thesis Service Inclusion

In accordance with the University of Leicester 'Regulations for Research Students',
I hereby give my consent for this thesis to be included in the British Thesis Service
operated by 'The British Library'.

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Statement of Confidentiality

The names and identification of respondents in this study are confidential. All names referred to are pseudonyms, and alternative names have been chosen to retain the gender and ethnicity of the respondents who participated.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the Context

The role of the interplay between emotions and workplace learning remains largely unexamined and undervalued in the related literature. This study contributes to knowledge by filling, in part, that gap, bringing together some of the insights on workplace learning with those on emotions in organisations, in order to further the understanding of both topics. Learning (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001; Newell et al., 2002; Alvesson, 2004) and emotions (Fineman, 2003) are vital aspects of individual and organisational life, yet ones that remain difficult to define and delimit by organisational researchers (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001; Jarvis and Parker, 2007). Although learning and emotions can be studied as separate phenomena, I will suggest that they are interconnected and interdependent (Höpfl and Linstead, 1997; Fineman, 1997; Brown, 2000; Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001; Atkins, 2002; Vince, 2002), something that mainstream management research tends to neglect.

This study also suggests that rationality and emotionality interpenetrate, and that risk, complexity and uncertainty, rather than control and mastery, are the characteristics of our time (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Emotions are key pointers to human learning, and the denial of emotions is the denial of learning (Boud et al., 1993). While much theory already exists on organisational learning (OL), workplace learning (WPL) and emotions at work, the interplay between emotional and learning processes still remains to be understood.

Thus, there is a need for further research exploring day-to-day practices in organisations (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Styhre et al., 2008). In particular, it should be outlined that organisations are emotional contexts dependent on human beings to work properly, and that “human beings are emotional animals: subject to anger, fear, surprise, disgust, happiness or joy, ease and unease” (Armstrong, 2000: 1). The need to understand the nature of the interdependence between learning and emotions is of primary importance, because these phenomena are “powerful sources of meaning and direction, supporting or inhibiting individuals and organisations in their attempts to re-define reality and find their place in it” (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001: 435).

This project develops this complex connection, exploring how learning and emotions are experienced by professionals at the micro level of their day-to-day practices, within their community of practice, in the context of the relational processes of their working life. In this regard, in 2011 I conducted a field study of emotions and workplace learning (WPL) in the Human Resource Development Office (HRD) of a large Italian Bank. This company, which I call ABC Bank (a pseudonym), was engaged in both the retail and corporate banking sectors. Selecting a single research site provided the opportunity to develop an in-depth and rich description of emotions and WPL. At the time of the research there were 33 people working in the HRD Office of ABC Bank and nineteen of them agreed to take part in this study, ten women and nine men. It should be noted that the research site was undergoing a corporate change programme at the time of my fieldwork.

That programme implied new procedural rules to follow, new technological devices to use, and a new hierarchical organisation of the Human Resource Division which directly affected the HRD Office itself. Theoretical claims are drawn from different traditions of studying organisations, learning and emotions. The thesis underlines the assumption that learning and emotions are complex phenomena as well as driving forces in human existence. It is also argued that they are essential elements of our being-in-the-world, that is of our living and changing (becoming) and of being intertwined in socio-cultural contexts.

1.2 Background to the Research

The domain in which this study is situated is organisational learning (OL), and workplace learning (WPL). Although there is no universally accepted definition of these concepts, the literature has chiefly taken two perspectives: one cognitive, based on individual learning (product); and the second, a social perspective, based on social and relational learning (process) (Sfard, 1998; Cook and Brown, 1999; Newell et al., 2002; Hislop, 2005; Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Elkjaer and Wahlgreen, 2006; Gherardi, 2006; Billett, 2008). The first perspective views learning as the act of gaining knowledge (product), in terms of concept development (Sfard, 1998). The second perspective emphasises learning as a practical process that “cannot be separated from the creation of (professional) identity” (Elkjaer, 2004: 422). Each of these concepts plays a contributory role in understanding the elements that affect the processes of learning for individuals in their work setting, and a complementary approach can contribute to a better conceptualisation of learning practices in organisations.

In addition, through this complementary focus on learning, the “needs of production can be reconciled with the needs of employees to have satisfying engagement with their work” (Antonacopoulou et al., 2006: 2). This study suggests an understanding of workplace learning as the natural, daily, ongoing learning process that is intimately connected to the work process (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Van Woerkem, 2003; Eraut, 2004). Workplace learning is here understood as the process of human change that is integrated in work activities, tacit, not highly structured, experiential, emotional, and socio-cultural (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Eraut, 2004). Overall, then, workplace learning in this project refers not to formally organised training events but to “informal learning”. This learning is also understood here as being embodied and embedded in daily practices, action and conversation (Fenwick, 2008).

There is no separation between thinking and acting at work, and learning (Billett, 2008). The relevant features which influence workplace learning that can be drawn from the literature (Doornbos et al., 2008) have been described as: personal characteristics (level of competence, individual valuing of WPL); relational characteristics (social integration with colleagues, managerial support, feedback, chance to participate in networks); work characteristics (task variation, task autonomy, work pressure). It is relevant to study workplace learning because the most important sources of learning are the challenges of work itself and interactions with other people in the workplace (Eraut, 2004; Billett, 2008). It is also significant to investigate workplace learning because our understanding of it is far less than that of formal learning (Berings et al., 2006 Doornbos et al., 2008) programmes such as formal training and learning projects.

The terms workplace learning, work-related learning, work-based learning and learning at work will be used interchangeably here, for simplicity, fully aware of their contested definitions. It is also argued that emotions are fundamental elements of learning, because people experience and express interest, love, hate, fear and joy all the time. Emotions, like learning, have been subject to different interpretations. The related literature on emotions has taken, broadly speaking, three main perspectives: the neuro-biological, the psycho-cognitive and the sociological. The neuro-biological approach recognises that there are some 'primitive' emotions that can be found in all human populations, and they represent complex mechanisms for the adaptation and survival of the individual (Darwin, 1872; James, 1890; Ekman and Davidson, 1994).

Recently, evolutionary psychologists (LeDoux, 1996; Cacioppo and Gardner, 1999; Damasio, 2003; Phelps, 2006) have argued that these mechanisms are the result of neurological programmes, and that the thinking parts of the brain are continually communicating with the emotional parts. The psycho-cognitive approach (Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer and Tran, 2003; Frijda, 2005) conceptualises emotions as private components of the individual personality, and states that they involve an evaluation/appraisal component, which stimulates the appropriate reaction to specific situations. The sociological approach (Hochschild, 1983; Denzin, 1984; Harré, 1986; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Lupton, 1998; Fineman, 2003; Turner and Stets, 2006) on the other hand views emotions as socio-culturally constructed, underlying the importance of emotion roles and scripts, as well as of language and sense-making.

Each of these perspectives offers important insights, and this project adopts a complementary approach to better conceptualise emotions in the workplace, because they are in a continuous dynamic process (Barbalet, 1998), in which they mediate body, mind and socio-cultural relations. In particular, emotions are here understood not only as displays of inner processes, but also as multifaceted complexes which are both cultural and embodied, and which originate in social relationships of power and interdependence (Burkitt, 1997; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Although there is no one perspective able to capture fully the complexities of these issues, in order to better understand them it is argued that all learning includes the interplay of three dimensions (Illeris, 2007): cognition (the content of meaning); emotion (the psychodynamic process); and sociality (the interaction between the individual and the environment). In this complementary understanding of the role of emotions in learning, rationality and sense-making (Weick, 2001; Jarvis and Parker, 2007; Merriam et al., 2006), the unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the organisation, but the ‘problematic situation’ or the ‘organisational event’, for example the everyday practices of learning and emotions at work. In this way experience and action (doing) are seen as part of a continuous transaction between individuals and organisations, where learning begins with body, emotion, conflict and intuition (Fineman, 2003; Elkjaer, 2004).

1.3 Research Aims and Contribution

The aims of this study are:

- 1) To bring together insights on workplace learning with those on emotions in organisations;

2) To further the understanding of both topics, by exploring how emotions and workplace learning and their interconnections are experienced, interpreted and enacted by professionals engaged in their everyday practices.

As already noted, to date the role of emotions in workplace learning remains largely unexamined and undervalued in the related literature (Atkins, 2002; Styhre et al., 2008). However, it appears that emotions can play a powerful role in encouraging and inhibiting effective workplace learning, since they are at the heart of our personhood. Therefore, the need to understand the nature of this interdependence is very important. “We live our lives through emotions” Solomon (2007: 1) argues, “and it is our emotions that give our lives meaning”. There are also increasing calls for more qualitative research in this field of investigation (Prasad and Prasad, 2002; Wilson, 2002; Tsoukas, 2005), because the research on learning and emotions in organisations has been held captive within the narrow influence of the Cartesian dualism of mind and body (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Emotions have for many years been regarded as separate from both our cognitive and bodily processes, but recently more complementary conceptions of the emotional self have become common. This revitalizing process has occurred especially within the broader focus on embodied learning (Horn and Wilburn, 2005; Merriam et al., 2006) and reflects notions of embodied emotions (Lupton, 1998). This need for a ‘complementary’ approach to these issues, urging us to combine multiple aspects of the complex phenomena of learning and emotions, is pursued in this thesis in order to better capture the multiple interconnections between workplace learning and emotions at work. Thus, this thesis contributes to knowledge by exploring those interconnections.

In this regard, two overarching meta-themes can be drawn from findings: 1. emotions and workplace learning are contextual and interdependent phenomena; 2. emotions and workplace learning are relational phenomena. Insights gained from this research could be used by organizations and professionals in order to promote a more reflective and ethical approach in developing social practices in the workplace.

1.4 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to further the understanding of both emotions and learning within organisations by exploring how they are experienced in practice, interpreted and enacted by professionals engaged in their day-to-day activities, and by discussing how these professionals understand the interconnections among workplace learning and emotions in the context of those daily activities. The study is guided by the following primary research question:

How do HRD professionals experience the everyday interplay between their emotions and their workplace learning?

Sub-questions were required (a) to identify the phenomena encapsulated in the core topic and examine their nature, and (b) to bring to the awareness of the research participants the nature of workplace learning and emotions, in order to access these phenomena during the investigation. The exploratory sub-questions were:

- How do these professionals experience and make sense of their emotions in the workplace?
- How do they experience and make sense of their workplace learning?

- How do they experience and make sense of the interactions between their emotions and workplace learning?

Answering these questions should provide some insights for a “more human engagement with the challenges working life provides” (Antonacopoulou et al., 2006: 1). Ideally, the findings from this study can add some information that is useful for management, human resources and professionals themselves in their attempts to develop a more innovative and humanistic workplace; a workplace that facilitates learning while nurturing the needs of employees to have satisfying working lives. This development of inquiry, from emerging experiences of everyday life, leads us straight into the flexible research approach of this project, as illustrated below.

1.5 Research Approach

This study employs a ‘flexible’ research approach (Robson, 2002), and explores participants’ experiences of emotions and workplace learning, in an effort to know more about the nature of these phenomena and their interconnections. By ‘flexible’ approach I simply mean ‘unfolding’ and less pre-specified than the traditional, fixed and hypothetical-deductive ones. It seems that the flexible research approach provides the “best fit” (Maxwell, 2005: 17) for this study, because of its potential to engender new understandings of the complex and manifold human phenomena of learning and emotions. The research topic, the purpose of the study and the research question further guide the researcher to select that approach as the best fit for this project.

Researchers who adopt a flexible approach “are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 2). In conducting this study, I apply the reflective life-world research (Dahlberg et al., 2008) concepts of: openness (to not make definite what is indefinite); inter-subjectivity (our relationship with the world around us); embodiment (“the body is our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 146) and it is not separate from the self); embodiment is also about attending to the bodies of both the researcher and participants as they share an inter-subjective relational space (Merleau-Ponty, 1962); and meaning (which is directly connected to the understanding of phenomena). These concepts are applied in an attempt to remain as open as possible to the phenomena of emotions and workplace learning from the perspective of the participants who experience them. The flexible research approach adopted here is rooted in the intellectual traditions of hermeneutics and pragmatism, as illustrated in Chapter Five. This approach is aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning of lived experience (Van Manen, 1997). This research approach is also an attitude by which we can try to grasp the significance of the wholeness of life.

In a holistic worldview, humans and their being in the world cannot be understood by procedures that reduce them to autonomous parts but can be fully understood only within a context in which relating and meaning are primary. The crucial aspect of the worldview of human science research is its ontological understanding of the human being in the world with others. (Dahlberg et al., 2001: 29)

Moreover, according to Heidegger, “understanding is not a way we know the world, but rather the way we are” (Polkinghorne as cited in Lavery, 2003: 8).

Research designed to understand the nature and interconnections of emotions and workplace learning, from the experiences and interpretations of HRD professionals in their “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998), suits the research approach supported here, because of its emphasis on complexity as one of its fundamental qualities (Gibson and Hanes, 2003). Within this research approach knowledge is considered to be a subject-dependent creation (Maturana and Varela, 1998), because “what is investigated is not independent of the process of investigation” (Smith, 1983: 8), and what counts as knowledge is “a matter of agreement within a socially and historically bounded context” (Smith, 1983: 8).

This study has been conducted in the HRD Office of an Italian Bank (not the one where I work). This makes a suitable case for research, because the HRD field involves recurrent human interactions and deals with complex problems, such as issues of, for example, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and power as well as human development. The selection of participants has been directed towards a particular context accessible to the researcher (i.e. located in Italy), in order to select information-rich cases for detailed study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Creswell, 2007). A detailed discussion of HRD professionals and professional practice is included in Chapter Three. HRD professional literature has not adequately addressed how HRD professionals experience the interplay between emotions and learning in the contexts of their daily working activities. The primary method of data selection has been face-to-face semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2004; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), and the focus of data selection has been on accessing the narrative, “deep, lived meanings that events have for individuals” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 113).

Interviews have been convincingly used by Eraut (2000) to study non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work, and by Vince and Saleem (2004) in order to examine the relationship between emotion, learning and organising. Data selected during the interviews have been recorded using a digital audio recorder, preserving the anonymity of the site and the confidentiality of participants as much as possible. Observations have also been used in order to enrich the quality of data selection, and to prompt interview questions and focus. Observation gives the researcher the means to access valuable data about what people actually do (Patton, 2002), focusing on the actions and interactions of people in their natural setting.

Participants carrying out their normal tasks have been observed, as well as their interactions in context, in order to stimulate reflection and to provide more points of reference for the interpretation of findings. These methods (interviews used to obtain meanings attached to work experiences and observation used to describe work settings and everyday practices) have been employed effectively in previous research on workplace learning (Collin, 2002; Berings et al., 2006; Handley et al., 2007) and on emotions at work (Fineman and Sturdy, 1999). As Patton (2002: 64) aptly suggests “[a] human being is the instrument of ... [flexible] methods. [And a] real, live person makes observations, takes field notes, asks interview questions, and interprets responses”. Data analysis has been developed from the research approach and has implied an iterative and open process, in order to bring order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

Continuous and negotiated permission to observe and interview has taken place, and a number of methods to establish trustworthiness has been utilised (e.g. compiling a field journal, thick descriptive data, evaluation of claims made in reported conversations and interpretations), bearing in mind that the researcher “has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires” (Creswell, 2003: 201) of the participants. The researcher has also taken measures to address the ethical issues (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Bell and Bryman, 2007) that have arisen during the research process, and they are better illustrated in Chapter Five. Protection of all the human subjects related to this project has been a primary concern for the researcher. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants have been respected in order to avoid harmful effects.

The researcher has also established a relationship with participants built on trust, disclosure, respect and reciprocity. This study contains limiting conditions, some related to the research approach in general and some related to the particular research methods utilised (e.g. the restricted research sample and the limited generalisability of the findings to other contexts). All these limitations have been dealt with during the research process by taking appropriate measures – e.g. transferability (rich description and detailed contextual information) has been sought instead of generalisability. It is acknowledged that the ‘case’ developed in this research is based upon the experiences of a particular group of HRD professionals working in a specific metropolitan area of northern Italy. It is not possible to produce generalisable results within the flexible research approach, since a major philosophical implication of this perspective is that there are multiple constructed realities.

Indeed, the research approach adopted here rests on the assumption that “the tendency to [generalise] may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience” (Van Manen, 1997: 22). It is hoped that the readers of this research will consider the applicability and resonance of the findings to their specific situations.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter One (Introduction) has illustrated the background to the thesis. Chapter Two (Emotions in the Workplace), Chapter Three (Workplace Learning) and Chapter Four (Connecting Emotions and Workplace Learning) present the theoretical framework informing this research. Chapter Two is a review of the literature on emotions in the workplace, including concepts like emotional labour and emotional intelligence. Chapter Three is a review of the literature on workplace learning, including some reference to the concept of HRD professionals, with an emphasis on human change. Chapter Four sketches a complementary and relational view of emotions and workplace learning. This view reflects the complexity of the phenomena under study. HRD literature has not adequately addressed how HRD professionals learn at work and the emotional aspects of that learning; therefore, this thesis aims at filling, at least in part, that gap. Chapter Five (Research Approach) introduces the philosophical framework underpinning this research project along with a detailed presentation and critique of the approach adopted.

Chapter Six (Findings I - Experiencing Emotions at Work) and Seven (Findings II – Experiencing Workplace Learning) present the research findings, with the former illuminating the topic of emotions at work as both a learned and partly unmanageable experience, and with the latter clarifying and contextualizing learning at work as an emotional phenomenon. Chapter Eight (Findings III – Experiencing the Interplay between Emotions and Workplace Learning) presents the research findings and interpretations related to the interconnections between emotions and workplace learning. Chapter Nine (Conclusions) summarises key findings and displays some implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the current theory and knowledge of emotions in the workplace. The purpose of an overview of the perspectives in the research literature is to contextualise this study within the broader parameters of a subject area which extends across psychology, sociology, organisation studies, biology, anthropology and philosophy. The key issues addressed include the nature of emotions and their role in the workplace. In this regard, the concepts of emotional labour and emotion management (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton, 2005), which point to the metaphor of the workplace as an ‘emotional arena’ (Fineman, 1993), are critically illustrated and debated. Finally, a ‘relational’ view of workplace emotions is proposed. It should be also acknowledged that the concept of ‘gender’ has certainly been identified as highly relevant to the study of emotions, but because of the breadth of theoretical material and the empirical exploration of emotions *per se* and WPL in this thesis it has been impossible here to sensibly elucidate that powerful concept in all its complexity.

2.2 The Background

The rationalisation thesis of modernity is, historically speaking, relatively recent, and it implies the division of rationality and emotionality in organisational analysis. Its roots can be traced back to the 18th century and the Enlightenment movement, while its rise is largely due to the widespread of the Industrial Revolution and its bureaucratic administrative paradigm.

Max Weber (1968: 975), who stated the rules of the ‘rational-legal bureaucracy’, explained that bureaucracy develops “... the more it is [dehumanised], the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation”. Indeed, Burrell (1999) indicates that alternative readings of Weber’s work occasion an almost immediate bifurcation in the field of organisation studies (OS). On the one hand, there is the concept of *verstehen* and Weber’s critical analysis of rationalism, and his comparing modern society to an ‘iron cage’. On the other hand, there is the structural-functionalist perspective (e.g. Talcott Parsons), with its emphasis on rationality as a tool for explanation, prediction and order.

The concept of rationality probably originated with the ancient Greek philosophy and the word *logos*, or *ratio* for Romans, from which the English notion of rationality seems to derive. Translated from Greek, the word *logos* encompasses a large semantic field: speech, reasoning, to give an account of, calculation and justice. To the ancient Greeks, the concept of *logos* does refer to both human knowledge and ethics, so that being rational and being ethical are interdependent concepts. In the modern era, particularly in the 16th century Renaissance, the meaning of rationality changed. At that time, rationality no longer referred to the ancient ethical spirit, but to the activity of an autonomous, self-developing human being. The notion of rationality became linked to the product of human reason. This is especially evident in the work of Descartes (1596-1650) and Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon states that “knowledge is power”.

Consequently, rationality becomes connected to human control over nature and society. With the Enlightenment movement, knowledge, reason and the scientific method are applied to the improvement of society itself. The religion of Gods is replaced by the religion of Science. In the context of the Enlightenment, the emergence of both the natural and social sciences is restricted to “disembodied processes without regard for the complex historical and social conditions in which science as a practice took place” (Smith, 1998: 55). Smith (1998: 61) also notes that the “Enlightenment marks the final break between pre-modern and modern knowledge, for it transformed the way in which the system of knowledge related to the social structure and social agency”. Modern rationality brings about disembodied mechanisms, that is, as Giddens (1991) argues, individuals are ‘lifted out’ from their traditional connections to place, time and space.

While modern rationality promises order and control of the social and the natural world, this may not be the case. In fact, Beck (1992) describes the world of 20th century capitalism as that of the ‘risk society’. His claim is that risk, complexity and uncertainty, rather than control and mastery, are the characteristics of our time. In addition, as in postmodern and feminist analysis, rationality is displayed to be discursive, that is, not real or true, but temporally, historically and culturally situated and attending to particular interests. However, these analyses do not automatically reject reason; rather they imply rejecting the universalistic, totalising, anthropocentric, racist and gender-biased character of modernist rationality. Consequently, it seems that what we need is a broader, more open, fair, humble and contingent concept of rationality, grounded in values, purposes, emotions, ethics and reflexivity.

As already noted, emotionality has often been viewed as the antithesis or lack of rationality, and “this has contributed to the negative perception [of emotions]” (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995: 102). Putnam and Mumby (1993: 36) encourage an alternative reading of the relationship between rationality and emotionality. They sustain that emotions are primary aspects of organising processes and that shared realities of the work context are negotiated through emotions.

It appears that rationality and emotionality interpenetrate, and this thesis tries to show how they may help to reinvigorate conventional management studies, and particularly workplace learning.

2.3 The Nature of Emotions

The dominant, dichotomised representation of rationality and emotionality, seems to be progressively replaced by a more realistic idea of organisational practices and processes as embodying both (Domagalski, 1999). Attempts to define emotions have been characterised since Plato and Aristotle by two noteworthy elements: “first, the presumption of palpability; and second, the interminability” (Gergen, 1995: 1). The different perspectives proposed and juxtaposed, which have their roots in many different fields of study (e.g. biology, neurology, cognitive studies, psychology, philosophy, sociology, organisation studies), try to understand these complex processes. Terms like *emotions*, *affect*, *feelings* and *mood* are commonly used interchangeably by some writers. Indeed, there is little consensus when it comes to definitions, but some important distinctions can be attempted (Fineman, 2003):

- “There is the *subjective* elements of emotions, what we *feel*. And there is the *displayed* feature of emotion, what we *show*” (Fineman, 2003: 8). In this paper, these two terms have been generally used in that way.
- Our emotional display is heavily influenced by social norms and cultural conventions.
- Moods are longer and more diffuse experiences than emotions; they are not usually connected to any particular object or event.
- Affect is an umbrella term encompassing feelings and emotions.

The related literature on emotions has taken, broadly speaking, three main perspectives: the neuro-biological, the psycho-cognitive, the sociological. As established in Chapter One, the neuro-biological approach recognises that there are some ‘primitive’ emotions that can be found in all human populations, and they represent complex mechanisms for the adaptation and survival of the individual (Darwin, 1872; James, 1890; Ekman and Davidson, 1994). Recently, evolutionary psychologists (LeDoux, 1996; Cacioppo and Gardner, 1999; Damasio, 2003; Phelps, 2006) have argued that these mechanisms are the result of neurological programmes, and that the thinking parts of the brain are continually communicating with the emotional parts. New research has shown that it is erroneous to attempt to study any aspect of human thinking and behaviour without addressing the emotions. Damasio (1994) refers to this as ‘Descartes’ error’. He claims that our cognitive and emotional systems in the brain operate more closely together than has been previously realised, and that reasoning is based upon what he calls ‘somatic markers’ in the physical body.

It seems that the limbic system in the brain (the cingulate cortex, the amygdalae, the hypothalamus) is where the critical linking point between the physiological and neurological systems resides (LeDoux, 1996; Damasio, 2003). Damasio (2003) indicates that this is what guides our emotional responses. As we learn more about the neuro-biology of emotions it becomes clear that the capability to be emotional is essential to human life. In this sense evolution has done us an extraordinary favour. Emotions provide us with key signals on how to deal with critical situations, as well as with daily encounters. They help us to adapt to our changing needs and environments, and give us the capacity to make sense of our world and share meanings. The neuro-biological approach takes an individualistic perspective by focusing its attention on the micro-level of human anatomy.

However, human emotions “...are also embedded in a lifetime of accumulated experiences and learning” (Fineman, 2003: 11), and there is little wonder, then, that their nature and sources are still mostly undiscovered. Hence we need to look at other perspectives in order to try to better understand human emotions. As also indicated earlier, the psycho-cognitive approach (Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996; Scherer and Tran, 2003; Frijda, 2005) conceptualises emotions as private components of the individual personality, and states that they involve an evaluation/appraisal component, which stimulates the appropriate reaction to specific situations. Functionally, emotions coordinate, structure and control human perception and sense-making, other people and the world in general (Frijda, 2005). Emotions help us to direct and regulate our level of attention selectively.

They make us more or less likely to perform particular courses of action or behaviours, thus affecting our relationships with others. Therefore, emotions not only impact on thoughts, actions and social relations, but they cannot be separated from them (Frijda, 2005). Moreover, the affective events theory (AET) holds that emotions at work are determined by moment-by-moment variations in the way people feel in the workplace (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) suggest that events and conditions in workplace contexts create ‘affective events’, which ultimately shape moods and emotions. Psychological interpretations rest upon the premise that emotions are intrapersonal, individual phenomena that are located in the body.

In particular, psychoanalysis is based on the assumption of an unconscious dimension to social and individual life, one in which ideas, desires and emotions reach consciousness in highly distorted, camouflaged or abstruse ways (Freud, 1988). However, the psycho-cognitive perspective does not address the way emotions are also social and cultural products, that is systems of meanings created and negotiated between people (Fineman, 2003). A number of authors have related psychodynamic approaches to emotions to social constructionist ones. As Vince (2006: 346) puts it, “Psychodynamic theory offers the insight that feelings are not only private experiences, but are shaped by, and linked to, the internalization or denial, of self-other relation”. He notes that meanings and feelings are influenced by political, social and cultural forces within organisational workplaces. Gabriel (1998) has also sought a sort of ‘rapprochement’ between psychodynamic and social constructionist views, suggesting that inner emotional experiences are moulded by social influences.

Along the same line of reasoning, as we have seen in Chapter One, the sociological approach (Hochschild, 1983; Denzin, 1984; Harré, 1986; Kemper, 1990; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Lupton, 1998; Fineman, 2003; Turner and Stets, 2006) views emotions as socio-culturally constructed, underlying the importance of emotion roles and scripts, as well as of language and sense-making. Each of these perspectives offers important insights, and this project adopts a complementary approach to better conceptualise emotions in the workplace, because they are in a continuous dynamic process (Barbalet, 1998), in which they mediate body, mind and socio-cultural relations. In particular, this study shows special regard for the sociological perspective and, notably, for the ‘relational’ approach to emotions (Gergen, 1995; Burkitt, 1997; Williams and Bendelow, 1998; Bolton, 2005). Thus emotions are here understood not only as displays of inner processes, but also as multifaceted complexes which are both cultural and embodied, and which originate in social relationships of power and interdependence (Burkitt, 1997; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). To say that emotions are social is “to spotlight the cultural settings in which emotions are learned and expressed” (Fineman, 2003: 15). The sociological perspective is illustrated in the next section.

2.4 The Sociological Study of Workplace Emotions

Sociology has indicated that exploring the organisation of work is not only a way of learning about the workplace itself, but is a way of learning, more generally, about the changes taking place in the social organisation of people’s lives (Hughes, 1971). The organisation of work reproduces other social divisions and inequities and its study is something that benefits from critical sociological analysis (Fineman, 2008).

Interest in the study of emotions in the workplace follows a history of sociological theorising of other forms of division and unfairness at work. The seminal work of Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), *The Managed Heart*, extends the sociological critique of the workplace to hypothesise that changing economic structures and conditions are producing a new form of work alienation through what she calls 'emotional labour'. Emotional labour requires face-to-face contact, the active effort to 'manage' emotions in oneself and/or in others in order to meet social guidelines, and a degree of employer's control over employees' emotional activities through training and supervision (Hochschild, 1983: 2-3). Hochschild's previous work has pointed out that emotions rather than being "unbidden and uncontrollable" are subject to what she defines as "feeling rules" (Hochschild, 1979: 551).

From those observations, Hochschild has developed an "emotion management perspective as a lens through which to inspect the self, interaction, and structure" (Hochschild, 1979: 551). By working on their perception of meaning, actors are able to perform 'emotion work', to negotiate socially inscribed meanings for emotions rather than simply being driven by biological emotional responses (Hochschild, 1979: 561). Hochschild's study of airline flight attendants finds that they have two ways of handling the proscribed emotions at work. One is to adapt their outward expression to produce a particular appearance, something that Hochschild calls 'surface acting' (Hochschild, 1983). But what trainers and supervisors of those airline flight attendants prefer them to do is to practice 'deep acting' (Hochschild, 1983). This involves suppressing what the attendants privately feel, to come into line with what trainers and supervisors want them to feel.

The airline companies desire passengers to feel safe, comfortable and cared for, and they expect flight attendants to gear their workplace towards this end (Hochschild, 1983: 4). “Thus surface acting changes outward behaviour; deep acting changes experienced feelings” (Fineman, 2003: 21). Hochschild (1983) argues that under intensified work conditions, being required to act on such a personal thing as feelings has negative effects on workers. Hochschild’s work also shows how emotions are open to manipulation within systems and structures of power, such as capitalist market forces. Hochschild’s conceptualisation has been applied to study the emotional labour of other kinds of workers and workplaces, and among them managers and professionals (Hochschild, 1983: 244-252).

Emotional labour has been extended to the study of fast-food operators (Leidner, 1993), supermarket clerks (Tolich, 1993), Disneyland employees (Van Manen and Kunda, 1989), and barristers (Harris, 2002). Hochschild, therefore, has provided some fundamental insights into the conflict of commercial and social feeling rules, which explain much of the tension regarding the expression of emotions in contemporary workplaces. Recently, however, some authors have found weaknesses in Hochschild’s (1979, 1983) accounts of organisational emotionality (Wouters, 1989; Tolich, 1993; Bolton, 2005; Theodosius, 2006). Firstly, it seems that within Hochschild’s theory “there is no room for ‘original’ emotions, only socially managed ones” (Theodosius, 2006: 899). Secondly, it has been underlined the fact that emotional labour does not necessarily involve alienation and costs (e.g. burnout) to the worker (Bolton, 2005). In fact, research has shown that the negative effects of emotional labour are not as simple as Hochschild has posited (Bolton, 2005).

For example, Callaghan and Thompson (2002) have noted that the workplace is a site of both pleasure and pain, and there is, therefore, some space for enjoyment and reward that can be gained from different emotional processes in the workplace itself. The ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (EI) branch of research has also contributed to show that emotional well-being and personal growth can be fostered at work, depending on different skills and emotional abilities among different individuals (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1996; Bar-On, 1997). The concept of ‘emotional labour’ elaborated by Hochschild seems after all ‘absolutist’ in its enforcement and consequences (Wouters, 1989; Tolich, 1993; Korczynski, 2002; Bolton, 2005).

Bolton (2005) asserts that it is time to move on from Hochschild’s ‘Managed Heart’, and she offers a new conceptual framework for understanding emotion management in the workplace. Bolton (2005: 60-61) underlines two main weaknesses in Hochschild’s work on organisational emotionality: firstly, an over-emphasis on the divide between the public and the private performances of emotional self-management; secondly, mistakenly equating a physical labour process with an emotional labour process. It seems that “Hochschild operates with the underlying assumption that there is no room for the ‘private’ in organisational life” (Bolton, 2005: 61); when operating within organisational boundaries our feelings become ‘transmuted’ by the company, and the ‘smile’, ‘mood’, ‘feeling’, or ‘relationship’, “comes to belong more to the [organisation] and less to the self” (Hochschild, 1983: 198).

The prominence given to ‘transmuted feelings’ in Hochschild’s description of emotion management arguably rules out the possibility that workers may exercise an ‘active and controlling force’ in relationships with management and clients (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Bolton, 2005). It also appears that equating a physical labour process with an emotional labour process (Hochschild, 1983) hinges on ‘transmuted feelings’, developing into a commodified object that exists apart from the employee (Korczynski, 2002; Bolton, 2005). This may not be the case, because the capacity to present a ‘sincere’ or ‘cynical’ performance lies within the emotional worker (Goffman, 1959). Whilst the organisation establishes criteria of control determining what constitutes ‘good service’, it is the worker who checks how much emotion needs to be invested into the performance (Bolton, 2005). Hochschild appears to neglect the ability of workers to succeed in getting ‘spaces for resistance and misbehaviour’ (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995) and to produce the ‘unmanaged organisation’ (Gabriel, 1995). Anyway, this is not to reject the importance of Hochschild seminal work. Developments in the literature propose new ways of conceptualising emotionality in organisations, ways in which the display of emotions is controlled and guided by both workers and managers in a number of distinctive modalities.

2.5 Debating Workplace Emotions

Research has suggested that workers doing emotional labour have more agency than Hochschild at first claimed. For instance, Tolich (1993) has argued that, in certain types of service work, the workers still find ways to make that service ‘their own’, proving that organisational control and worker autonomy are not uncomplicated.

Leidner (1993) has shown that some fast-food workers find the rules of company scripts a relief when it comes to handling difficult customers. Jobs with emotional labour in some cases offer employees a higher level of satisfaction than other types of work (Wharton, 1999). These studies suggest that doing emotional labour has more complex consequences than simply burnout or alienation. The presence of agency in workplace performers is also highlighted in recent studies into the 'powerful' work category of 'professionals' (Pierce, 1999; Harris, 2002; Anleu and Mack, 2005). What this research has shown is that emotional labour is not limited to service workers, but it extends to professional workers as well. Moreover, professionals experience emotional labour as demanding work that can lead to burnout, although not unavoidably.

One of the few studies on emotional labour of professionals concentrates on barristers and stresses the need to examine the emotional labour of these professionals on five premises (Harris, 2002). Firstly, Harris indicates the already mentioned little empirical research which has focused on the emotional labour of professional workers. Secondly, he argues that professional work is different in some important ways from service work. In fact, professions are governed by formalised codes of practice so that barristers' delivery of emotional labour is required to adhere to the social expectations that accompany their professional categorisation. Thirdly, barristers are largely 'self-regulating' actors who are capable of controlling their workplace performances. Fourthly, they belong to a group of professionals who are required to "serve a greater good" (Harris, 2002: 555), that is a higher 'moral' good (e.g. justice).

Finally, their work also involves a greater “reliance on the ingenuity, reflexivity and innovativeness of the individual professional” (Harris, 2002: 555). This type of reliance is likely to imply different emotional demands from those required in service work. In spite of their professional status, Harris finds that, like other workers, barristers feel pressure from clients to provide a certain genre of emotional service and their ‘training’ includes being taught how to ‘feel’ in ways appropriate to their profession (Harris, 2002: 569). In Harris’ study displays of ‘genuine’ emotions are often judged as ‘unprofessional’, resulting in “a range of occupational coping mechanisms to suppress genuine emotional display” (Harris, 2002: 567).

In this regard, barristers’ provision of emotional labour extends into their lives outside of work, and to their intimate partners’ lives, as prominent fellow workers are hosted in barristers’ homes in order to safeguard ongoing access to contracts (Harris, 2002: 568). Emotional labour of professionals further diverges from the emotional labour of front-line service workers in that it does not entail direct supervision and this aspect has been employed to underline the limitations of emotional labour for conceptualising professional work (Bolton, 2005: 52). The study of Anleu and Mack (2005) has indicated that the emotional labour of professional magistrates is supervised, albeit in a quite different manner than that of front-line service workers. Their

...performance of emotional labour is monitored, not by a supervisor on hand, but by a more amorphous audience including themselves taking account of judicial ethics, appeal court judges, journalists, and court users. (Anleu and Mack, 2005: 614)

It is not only the presentation of ‘feeling’ that is a taxing workplace endeavour, but containing emotions is also a difficult task and this ‘containment’ is similarly directed by professionals themselves as well as by others who assess and observe their workplace performances (Anleu and Mack, 2005: 599). There are some relevant findings in these studies on emotional labour and professional work. First, even when employees experience greater autonomy at work than service personnel, the need to display that they “serve a greater good” (Harris, 2002: 554) requires attention to the style of service provided by the employee. Second, even in situations of greater autonomy, workers still need to perform emotional labour and, indeed, rather than being easier their emotional labour has to be accomplished in ways that demand greater flexibility of performance (Harris, 2002: 555).

Finally, even when emotional labourers are not directly supervised by superiors, a high public profile means that professional workers are aware of the necessity to perform, although to a more amorphous public than other emotional labourers. In this chapter so far, then, it has been argued that Hochschild’s theorising about emotions as socially negotiated phenomena, that could be exploited by an employer’s pursuit of commercial profits, draws attention to the role of emotional labour in contemporary capitalist societies. It has also been suggested that recent research has extended Hochschild’s analysis to other workplaces, confirming the centrality of emotional labour for a variety of different types of workers. This recent research has shown that valuable as the concept of emotional labour is, it does not explain some of the significant differences in the emotional labour of professionals in comparison with other emotional workers.

The key distinctions in the emotional labour of professionals comprise expectations generated by the understanding of their work as serving a 'greater good', the need for greater flexibility and innovativeness in the way this work is carried out, and the relevance of emotional labour to the insecure nature of ongoing access to income for self-employed professionals. In the final part of this section, the framework recently proposed by Bolton (2005) to integrate Hochschild's seminal work will be illustrated. Bolton has acknowledged the important contribution Hochschild has made in helping to understand emotional labour in capitalist societies. Nevertheless, Bolton (2005) argues for a more nuanced interpretation of social actors through her introduction of a new four-pronged framework of workplace emotions. As we have seen, Hochschild's model of the social actor seems to allow little opportunity for evaluating issues such as employees' resistance to management requests or the negotiation of meaning that takes place within workplaces (Bolton, 2005). The outcome is

... something of a one-dimensional portrayal of organisational life ... with frustrated managers, emotionally exhausted workers and dissatisfied customers becoming the central focus of analysis. (Bolton, 2005: 53)

Along the same lines of Bolton's argument, Callaghan and Thompson's (2002) study has shown that the workplace is a site of both pleasure and pain, so that spaces for resistance and misbehaviour can actually be created (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995) and some enjoyment and reward can be gained from emotion work itself. Bolton's point of view is also supported by other researchers who have likewise observed that the concept of emotional labour proves to be inadequate in explaining autonomy and resistance in employees' accounts (Tolich, 1993; Wharton, 1999).

Bolton's typology (2005) makes an important contribution to these issues because it offers a multi-dimensional approach to the analysis of emotions in organisations. This approach is based on the conception of the organisational actor as a skilled actor or better a "multi-skilled" emotion manager (Bolton, 2005: 11), and it also acknowledges the variable motivations and ways that workers have for performing the management of emotions in the workplace. Bolton (2005) argues that, although there are forces moulding and channelling both emotions and displays of emotionality that may be oppressive to workers, to a large extent, the individual actor is capable of negotiating a way through an organisation's feeling rules and to preserve a sense of him/herself as being in control of emotions.

She proposes a social view of workplace emotionality, and introduces her typology of four different dimensions of emotion management in the workplace. Her model characterises these dimensions as pecuniary, prescriptive, presentational and philanthropic emotion (Bolton, 2005: 93), as illustrated below (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Bolton's typology of workplace emotion (adapted from Bolton, 2005: 93)

	Pecuniary	Prescriptive	Presentational	Philanthropic
Feeling Rules	Commercial	Professional Organisational	Social	Social
Associated Motivations	Instrumental	Altruism Status Instrumental	Ontological Security	Gift
Performance	Cynical Compliance	Cynical/ Sincere Consent Commitment	Sincere/ Cynical Commitment Consent	Sincere Commitment
Identity	Imposed/ Self	Professional/ Self	Self	Self
Consequences	Alienation Contradiction Conflict Resistance	Professional Identity Contradiction	Stability	Stability Satisfaction

Pecuniary emotion management can be compared to Hochschild's emotional labour where actors provide their emotional labour for economic reasons according to commercial feeling rules. Their display may result in cynical or compliant performances and there is the possibility for alienation from the benefits of this work (Bolton, 2005: 91-93). Prescriptive emotion management takes account of emotional labour in circumstances where an organisation's expectations for this work are not automatically related to a profit reason. These first two categories may be roughly compared to Hochschild's emotional labour concept (Bolton, 2005: 91-92). The other two types of Bolton's framework are designated presentational and philanthropic emotion management.

Bolton's orientation to the social actor is very close to Goffman's work, and it is in the portrayal of presentational emotion that the debt is clearly evident. This type of emotion management operates according to social feeling rules inspired by the actor's need for ontological safety or a sense of 'self' (Bolton, 2005). The link between presentational and philanthropic emotion management is that both are guided by social feeling rules and without an economic purpose. They can be both compared to Hochschild's term 'emotion work' (Bolton, 2005: 91-92). Philanthropic emotion management reveals how organisational actors may not only decide to follow organisational feeling rules but choose to give that 'little extra' during a social performance in the workplace (Bolton, 2005: 92). The result is again a strong sense of self but with the added benefit that organisational actors can reinforce their sense of being unselfish through the dearth of an external request for the performance or gift. Bolton's typology seems to allow for a balance between the 'enabling' and 'constraining' features of social structure.

In effect, this typology shows that actors, whilst constrained by organisational structures, are still capable of holding ‘multiple selves’ (Goffman, 1967). By depicting the organisational actors’ ability to draw upon different sets of feeling rules according to judgements about the contexts of interaction, Bolton’s framework accounts for variations in the consequences of those performances. Each of Bolton’s four ‘ideal types’ may be seen in different combinations in any one workplace. Each entails a different set of feeling rules, motivations, performances, identity claims and results. Bolton’s framework thus captures the significance of organisational actors’ interpretive efforts and their skills to change their social performances accordingly.

Bolton’s framework fills a gap within emotional labour literature by allowing for an analysis of emotion management activities regardless of whether the aim is economic profit or not, making the typology applicable to public service organisations (Bolton, 2005: 126). Bolton thus solves the problem she sees with emotional labour’s dearth of usefulness for understanding the range of motivations and consequences of emotions in the workplace, by developing a typology for interpreting the different feeling rules workers are able to draw upon. By postulating different sets of feeling rules, Bolton’s model clarifies how workers can claim some autonomy for themselves even within organisational prescriptions for emotions, and how it is that emotional labour can be an enjoyable aspect of work even though it may also lead to ‘burnout’. It is also suggested here that measurement of emotions is problematic, since it forces emotions into a positivist format where they are “likely to be truncated, [and] eviscerated” (Fineman, 2004: 731).

The everyday emotional experience does not seem to be filled up with measurable artefacts. As Waldron notes

... in our haste to measure and quantify, we researchers have sometimes sanitized the emotional messiness of working life ... [and] the restricted vocabulary of operationalized variables and standardized surveys seems particularly ill-suited for representing the passions that erupt forcefully, if only intermittently, to define and redefine relationships among co-workers. (Waldron, 2000: 64)

Qualitative studies of workplaces experiences can capture the ‘emotional messiness’ reported by Waldron (Fineman, 2004). It is therefore possible to research emotions in the workplace without quantifying them, using more interactional and context-focused methods of inquiry. In this regard, a ‘relational view’ of workplace emotions will be proposed in the next section of this chapter.

2.6 A Relational View

As mentioned before, I have special regard in this study for the sociological perspective and, notably, for the ‘relational’ approach to emotions (Gergen, 1995; Burkitt, 1997; Bolton, 2005). “Just as we are essentially social, so are our emotions” (Rafaeli and Worline, 2001: 96). In particular, emotions are here understood not only as displays of inner processes, but also as multifaceted complexes or modes of communication which are both socio-cultural and embodied (Lupton, 1998), and which originate in social relationships of power and interdependence (Burkitt, 1997; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). The very word *emotion* most probably derives from the Latin ‘*emovere*’ (e=out and movere=to move).

Thus, emotion means essentially ‘to move out’. This etymological interpretation reflects the fact that to experience emotions is to engage in and bodily enact deliberate and meaningful relations with the world (Küpers and Weibler, 2008). What matters most in the emotional encounter is the experience of “immediate contact with the world the self has through involvement” (Barbalet, 2002: 1). When looking for emotions it appears that a balance ought to be found between a focus on the internal versus a focus on the external, a focus on the individual versus a focus on the social (Bolton, 2005). In this regard, a relational view can be helpful because it underscores both agency and culture, as well as neither reducing structure to agency or agency to structure. A key premise of the relational view presented here is that meaning is shaped in the process of interaction with other people in social situations (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Denzin, 1984; Giddens, 1984; Gergen, 1995; Burkitt, 1997; Archer, 2000; Bolton, 2005). As Solomon (2002) remarks

there is good reason to suppose that we have never met a raw, unembellished, basic emotion, one not ‘covered over’ with the trappings of culture and experience and constrained and complicated by the ‘display rules’ of society. (Solomon, 2002: 118)

The result is that whatever physiological roots human emotions have they are considerably overlaid with socio-cultural conditioning (Bolton, 2005). Nonetheless, the boundary between the ‘physiological substrate’ (Kemper, 1990) of emotions and the modelling dictated by the socialisation process is almost impossible to identify in many cases. Social events, norms and practices are open to change and individuals have the capacity to recognise and work with alternative interpretations of the world surrounding them (Bolton, 2005).

As Goffman has pointed out actors are ‘products’ of social processes which exist around them but at the same time, through interactions with the ‘audience’, they are involved in their own ‘self-production’ (Goffman, 1959: 245). The argument presented here rests upon the assumption that social actors interpret their identity as individuals in terms of “... joined and separated ... episodes of co-present interaction” (Denzin, 1984 : 61). Nevertheless, the “realm of human agency is bounded” (Giddens, 1992: 168). Whilst resisting the view that emotions are externally imposed, we must be mindful of the dangers of overestimating agency. It is often the powerful who set the agenda with the ‘traffic rules of interaction’ (Goffman, 1967), which constrain the individual with various degrees of social pressure to conform to them.

In brief, the approach to emotions suggested here assumes that emotions are actively ‘managed’ by people still capable of possessing ‘multiple selves’ (Goffman, 1967), but according to the ‘traffic rules’ of a particular situation set within wider structures of socio-cultural principles and values (Bolton, 2005). The variability of human conduct cannot be wholly captured by organisational assigned feeling rules, so that ‘unmanaged spaces’ may be created, spaces in which people “can engage in all kinds of unsupervised, spontaneous activity” (Gabriel, 1995: 478). As mentioned above, within these spaces it is possible to perform ‘presentational’ and ‘philanthropic’ emotion management, that is to be many things to many people (Bolton, 2005): close friends, enemies, colleagues, adversaries, jokers, bullies, to name but a few.

The idea of spaces captures the ability of organisational actors to escape from externally imposed feeling rules and enables an exploration of a “special kind of absenteeism, a defaulting not from prescribed activity but from prescribed being” (Goffman, 1961: 171). The concepts of ‘presentational’ and ‘philanthropic’ performances add considerably to the richness of the analysis of emotion work, because they capture workplace emotions in their many forms, “within spaces for resistance and misbehaviour, spaces for the gift exchange, spaces for occupational communities, spaces for a bit of a laugh, spaces for violations, and spaces for the creation and maintenance of identity” (Bolton, 2005: 135). Many forms of activity are undertaken in those different ‘spaces’ according to social feeling rules and people in workplaces utilise them to establish and maintain family bonds, to ease anger and anxiety, to resist demands placed on them by management, and to take time to provide extra emotion work as a gift to co-workers or clients (Bolton, 2005). Those small spaces of resistance and misbehaviour do not promise grand disruptions or revolutions but every workplace has those spaces, those ‘damp corners’ as Goffman defines them, where the demands of work are mediated, where resistance “breeds and starts to infest the establishment” (Goffman, 1961: 268). As Goffman also contends, within those dark corners employees can safeguard their sense of self from prescribed rules:

Whenever we look at a social establishment, ... we find that participants decline in some way to accept the official view of what they should be putting into and getting out of the [organisation] and, behind this, of what sort of self and world they are to accept for themselves. Where enthusiasm is expected, there will be apathy; where loyalty, there will be disaffection; where attendance, absenteeism; where robustness, some kind of illness; where deeds are to be done, varieties of inactivity.

We find a multitude of homely little histories, each in its way a movement of liberty.

Wherever worlds are laid on, underlives develop. (Goffman, 1961: 267)

Moreover, in what Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) present as ‘the complicity of management’, management perceives some forms of misbehaviour as fruitful means of preserving controllable levels of conflict and ‘turn a blind eye’ to a bending of rules, or they are implicated in resisting organisational policies themselves. This analysis suggests that emotion work continually crosses boundaries between self and society, private and public, formal and informal (Bolton, 2005). Organisational actors constantly juggle their mixed emotions and feelings in order to both enjoy and survive the complexities involved in organisational life (Bolton, 2005). Those complexities seem to urge us to avoid the split between viewing emotions as the product of bio-physical processes or else as a completely socially constructed phenomenon (Freund, 1990). Freund (1990: 458) prefers to see emotions as a ‘mode of being’ or a relationship between embodied selfhood, thought and existence. Elias (1991) also points out that the physicality of the emotions is interconnected inextricably with socio-cultural meanings and social relationships. There is, therefore, a reciprocal correlation between embodiment and socio-cultural processes in the emotional experience. There is a variety of embodied perceptions, sounds, and movements (e.g. tears, heart rate, sweating, smiling, shouting) that all human beings have the capacity to experience and display as emotional states. As Lupton argues:

all emotions, as well as thought and action, can be described as ‘embodied’ simply because they are experienced by humans who are inevitably embodied, and who perceive and understand the social and material worlds necessarily through the body’s senses. (Lupton, 1998: 36)

This notion is derived from Merleau-Ponty's writings on the phenomenology of human existence, where he states that the body is "our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 146). Being-in-the-world entails the whole human being with her/his thoughts, bodily actions, relations and emotionality. All of these phenomena are interconnected in ways that cannot be parted from each other because they are part and parcel of the same phenomenon of our lived experience. This analysis also indicates that emotions have sense and meaning in the context of interrelations to other bodies, both human and non-human (Burkitt, 2002). Emotions are best thought of as complexes because they emerge from both the body and discourse yet they are reducible to neither (Burkitt, 2002). Because of this, body and mind, emotions and rationality must be seen as "interrelated phenomena, the one contained within the other" (Burkitt, 2002: 153).

As noted by Brown and Stenner (2001), the idea that emotions are complex processes, involving both affective and intellectual components, can be traced back to Spinoza (1677/1993). For Spinoza, emotions imply modifications of the body by which its power for action is either enhanced or decreased (Brown and Stenner, 2001). These modifications influence the body so that "affects are emergent orderings of the relational field made up in the encounter between manifold finite beings" (Brown and Stenner, 2001: 89). In this way, Spinoza shows how emotions are emergent within relationships, encounters and action. "Like G.H. Mead, Spinoza understands that human interaction involves not only being affected by others and acting on that affect, but that the subsequent action also affects the others in the relation and, in turn, spurs them to further action" (Burkitt, 2002: 158).

Denzin (1984: 2) underlines the fact that all “experiences of being emotional are situational, reflective, and relational”. Emotions are felt in relations to other interactants, and emotionality is a dialogue with the world (Denzin, 1984). In short, “[people] are their emotions” (Denzin, 1984: 1). Thus, human emotions are bodily and socio-cultural complexes which give meaning to our relational experiences in the workplace and, more generally, they are “complexes that express our whole way of being – our physical and discursive life, our material and ideal presences and absences [in the emotional dynamics of power relations]” (Burkitt, 2002: 166). In the next chapter, this ‘relational view’ will be linked to the study of workplace learning and, finally, it will be expanded when connecting emotions and workplace learning (Chapter Four).

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the literature related to the nature of emotions and their role in the workplace has been presented. In particular, the concepts of emotional labour and emotion management have been critically reviewed. Traditional research on emotions has tended to focus on personal affective dispositions or to split emotions into positive or negative groups; other streams of research have emphasised emotional expressions (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989; Bolton, 2005). This last line of reasoning has been stressed here through the introduction of a ‘relational’ view of workplace emotions (Gergen, 1995; Burkitt, 1997; Bolton, 2005).

This relational view considers emotions as multifaceted complexes or modes of communication which are both embodied and socio-cultural (Lupton, 1998), and which originate in social relationships of power and interdependence (Burkitt, 1997; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Thus, it has been sustained that human emotions give meaning to our relational experience in the workplace and, more generally, to our whole way of being-in-the-world with others (Denzin, 1984; Burkitt, 2002). Organisational actors constantly juggle their mixed emotions and feelings in order to both enjoy and survive the complexities involved in organisational life (Bolton, 2005) like, for example, workplace learning.

CHAPTER THREE

WORKPLACE LEARNING

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the immense body of literature that deals with workplace learning (WPL). Researching learning in relation to work and organisations is not new. However, in recent years there has been growing interest among employers, researchers, and policy makers in what constitutes WPL theory and practice. This interest may be attributed to economic and socio-political developments such as globalisation, the knowledge economy, deregulation, the ageing of the workforce, fast technological progress and so on. Today we may say that learning is really “the new form of labour” (Zuboff, 1988: 395). The focus on WPL has moved beyond the traditional view that individuals only engage in vocational training and formal education before entering the workforce. In the past, learning was assumed to be a formal activity that exclusively occurred in classrooms or in other structured settings. Nowadays, as a concept and set of practices, WPL is emerging as an important way to develop new skills and knowledge and to keep up with work-related changes. Today’s employees are expected to learn new knowledge and competencies through their everyday interactions and participation in the workplace. However, it appears that the sets of interests involved are broader than that. Employers too are interested in WPL, in that they can benefit significantly from investing in workforce development (Evans et al., 2006).

Workplace learning is thus often represented, conceptualised and advertised as advantageous, at least potentially, for both employers and employees. In this regard, Boud and Garrick observe:

The workplace has become a site of learning associated with two quite different purposes ... The first is the development of the enterprise through contributing to production, effectiveness and innovation; the second is the development of individuals through contributing to knowledge, skills and the capacity to further their own learning both as employees and citizens in the wider society. (Boud and Garrick, 1999: 6)

The emergence of WPL suggests that employees and organisations now realise that they need to concentrate on everyday learning to ensure continual development. Lifelong learning seems vital because organisations, employers and employees are handling complex environments characterised by change. Moreover, organisations want to maintain and develop competitive advantage, while employees are expected to learn new knowledge and skills to remain employable and be satisfied with their working conditions. Accordingly, nowadays the ‘psychological contract’ encompasses WPL as an important strategy for sustainable and competitive advantage, as well as for survival and growth. A number of scholars from different fields of study have contributed to what can now be considered a discipline in its own right, workplace learning. For example, academics including Marsick and Watkins (1990), Boud and Garrick (1999), Beckett and Hager (2002), Eraut (2004), Evans, Hodgkinson, Rainbird and Unwin (2006), Illeris (2007), Billett (2008) and Fenwick (2008) have drawn attention to workplace learning. Literature can also be found in other disciplines such as organisational learning (Section 3.2) and adult learning (Section 3.3).

Organisational learning emerges from management and organisational studies and, within this field, learning is regarded as a means to develop and manage the enterprise as a whole. Adult learning provides a useful foundation for understanding the way adults learn in the workplace and more generally. To express the view that learning is an integral part of working, Watkins (1995) broadly depicts workplace learning as what adult learners do in the workplace. Workplace learning, then, is “a site of intersecting interests, contested ideas, multiple forms of writing and rapidly evolving practice” (Boud, 1998: 11). It refers to a large body of knowledge and is rather a problematic term, “given its implication of a bounded identifiable place, whereas work and related learning activities tend to be spatially and temporally fluid” (Fenwick, 2008: 240).

Workplace learning is a broad signifier widely used to describe workplaces as rich landscapes of learning because of the opportunities they offer for mixing formal and informal learning, individual and teamwork, and for sharing experiences between novices and experts (Van Woerkom and Poell, 2010). It is also interesting to note that the employment relationship is critical to WPL because “the workplace is a site where employees experience the unequal power relations between themselves and the employer” (Evans et al., 2006: 5). This chapter does not aim to be exhaustive, rather to develop a history and context within which this part of the research is conceived and discussed. It includes some reference to the concepts of organisational learning, adult learning, HRD professionals, and finally proposes a ‘relational’ view of workplace learning itself which combines the acquisition and participation metaphors for learning (Sfard, 1998) and emphasises the ‘relational interdependence’ between personal and social agency (Billett, 2008).

This literature review is expected to present a useful overall framework for conceptualising and thinking about WPL, as well as to provide complementary perspectives on the multifaceted aspects of WPL.

3.2 Organisational Learning

Conceptions of organisational learning (OL) and of the learning organisation (LO) are ubiquitous these days. The first term (OL) refers to the study of the learning processes within organisations, from an academic viewpoint (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003). The second term (LO) refers to an 'entity', an 'ideal type' of organisation which is capable of learning effectively and hence to flourish (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003). Since Max Weber, organisational theory has engaged in this issue which remains a current concern. The body of literature that deals with learning in organisations is immense (for example, Shrivastava, 1983; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Huber, 1991; Dodgson, 1993; Easterby-Smith, 1997; Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003), and it is not possible here to give a comprehensive review. The first references to OL were based on theories of organisational behaviour (OB) within the field of management science (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963; Cangelosi and Dill, 1965; Argyris and Schön, 1978/1996). This early research in the emerging field of OL was concerned with information processing and decision making. The goal was to help organisations learn to adapt to change and to equip them with prescriptive managerial procedures. Much of this early literature on OL (and on the LO) is influenced by an individual-oriented idea of learning.

The meaning of the word ‘learning’ in those accounts is broad and often ambiguous. Even the discourses on OL leave learning itself ill-defined, not linked to educational theory and “simplistically mechanical” (Spender, 1996: 64). In many of those accounts, learning is also seen as the unproblematic diffusion of objective, uncontested knowledge (‘knowledge delivery’) from a knowledgeable source (‘the expert’) to the subject (‘the learner’) lacking that knowledge (Eckert, 1989, Huzzard, 2004; Gherardi, 2006). Learning appears to start from individuals, and OL is founded on the learning processes of individuals in the organisation. These individual processes can then, by way of people acting on behalf of the organisation, be fixed in organisational procedures and codes of behaviour and become organisational learning (Elkjaer, 2004).

However, individual learning does not automatically lead to OL, and it is the task of management to integrate individual learning into OL. Broadly speaking, the most widely recognised approaches to individual learning are: the Behavioural Theory, the Cognitive Theory, the Social Cognitive Theory, and the Gestalt Theory, expressing a wide range of learning models. The Behavioural Theory is an overall guideline to make sense of principles by which human behaviour is learned and sustained. In its classical framework the Behavioural Theory attributes learning to the association between stimulus and response (e.g. Pavlov’s work conditioning dogs to salivate on hearing a bell that they had been conditioned to associate with food; Skinner’s research on ‘positive reinforcement’).

In all, this theory holds that “learning is the process by which an activity originates or is changed through reacting to an encountered situation, provided that the characteristics of the change in activity cannot be explained on the basis of native response tendencies, maturation, and temporary states of the organism” (Hilgard and Bower, 1966: 2). The Cognitive Theory (e.g. Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky) deals with the way in which the awareness of the outside world is internalised either through assimilation (by fitting the ideas into our minds) or accommodation (by changing our existing knowledge). Learning takes place when certain cognitive signals associated with the choice point may eventually lead to a target or a reward (Luthans, 1998). The Social Cognitive Theory integrates both social and cognitive processes to make sense of motivation, emotions and action (Bandura, 1986). The main learning methods that this theory purports are observational learning (to learn from models), enactive learning (to learn from experiences), self-efficacy (to learn from perceptions of own performances).

The Gestalt Theory suggests that “human nature is organised into patterns or wholes, that it is experienced by the individual in these terms, and that it can only be understood as a function of the patterns of wholes of which it is made” (Perls, 1973: 5). From this point of view, humans do not perceive things in isolation, but organise them through their perceptual processes into meaningful wholes; mind and body are a unified whole, and mental and physical activities are inseparable. Learning takes place on the ‘whole’ person level, and is an interaction between mind and body, between people and environment, rather than merely a ‘mental act’ (Ikehara, 1999).

These individual learning theories have a significant impact on the concept of OL. Thus, according to these theories, learning is identical to the improvement of individuals' mental models ('cognitive structures'), and happens when individuals acquire information and knowledge, which can regulate their and the organisation's behaviour. In individual learning theories, the focus on learning is directed towards what goes on in people's minds (Elkjaer, 2003). This approach rests upon an understanding of learning inherent in the metaphor of acquisition (Sfard, 1998). The most prominent proponents of this understanding are Argyris and Schön (1996). They propose that:

Organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization's behalf. They experience a surprising mismatch between expected and actual results of action and respond to that mismatch through a process of thought and further action that leads them to modify their images of organization or their understandings of organizational phenomena and to restructure their activities so as to bring outcomes and expectations into line, thereby changing organizational theory-in-use. (Argyris and Schön, 1996: 16)

In this interpretation, learning is seen as the detection and correction of errors solved by individuals' inquiry into 'problematic' situations in organisations perceived as 'learning systems' made up of channels for information. Argyris and Schön (1978) also distinguish two types of learning: single loop and double loop learning. They argue that a mismatch between expectations and outcome (i.e. the results of an action are not what the organisation had expected) is the starting point for organisational learning processes. The organisation has to discover how to change its actions in order to accomplish the intended outcome.

First, this learning process can occur at the level of single loop learning: this results in the organisation making small adjustments to its actions, but it does not entirely change them. However, making small adjustments at the action level is not always enough to solve the problem. Then a double loop learning process is needed in order to solve the problem. In this case, the organisation has to change its assumptions and innovate its existing practices. Next to the processes of single and double loop learning Argyris and Schön (1978) have indicated a third level of organisational learning, that is 'deutero-learning'. This latter refers to the capacity for 'learning how to learn' (Senge, 1990) that organisations can develop. Another relevant example of this line of thinking is Senge's (1990) work on 'The Fifth Discipline', in which he sustains the importance of learning to think of organisations in terms of systems (abstract entities), that is to learn 'systems thinking' in order to promote learning organisations.

In all the above mentioned explanations, learning is for the learner to come to know the world, and that knowledge is out there, somewhere, stored in places (e.g. books, databases, minds) waiting to be transmitted to and acquired by another mind for future usage (Elkjaer, 2004; Gherardi, 2006). In the OL literature which rests upon individual learning theory, learning is considered as a clear-cut activity, something to be initiated, stimulated, and to be finished (Elkjaer, 2004). However, OL understood as individuals' knowledge acquisition, as improvement of individuals' cognitive skills, is problematic in that it does not explain the issue of transferring individual learning outcomes to the organisation (Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Elkjaer, 2004).

Some authors (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) have attempted to explain the issue of transferring individual learning outcomes (knowledge) to the organisation by means of the concept of knowledge creation (learning and innovation). In this regard, knowledge creation is an individual task in which tacit knowledge is supposed to be converted into explicit knowledge through socialisation processes (e.g. teaching and learning), with the role of the organisation being to provide a context for such individuals to create knowledge. Nevertheless, that theory has been convincingly criticised, for example, by Tsoukas (2005) who shows how Polanyi (1958/1962) actually stated that tacit and explicit knowledge are not two separate forms of knowledge, but rather inseparable and necessary constituents of all knowledge ('the two sides of the same coin'). It seems therefore 'nonsense' (Wilson, 2002) to talk about converting one form into the other and back again.

This lack of explanation informs, at least in part, the emergence of new definitions of learning available from the so-called social (or practice-based) perspective on organisational learning, which highlights its situatedness and practical nature (Cook and Yanow, 1993; Nicolini and Mezner, 1995; Gherardi et al., 1998). This perspective makes reference to the embeddedness of learning in everyday human action, where "[learning] is a practical, rather than a cognitive process and cannot be separated from the creation of (professional) identity" (Elkjaer, 2004: 422). This new OL literature is based upon the participation metaphor (Sfard, 1998), in which learning is understood as part and parcel of human activity and, therefore, it cannot be avoided (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Brown and Duguid, 1991; Nicolini et al., 2003).

Thus, learning is about the construction of communities of practice and membership, that is of people becoming competent practitioners (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Wenger, 1998). OL becomes then a social activity, and learning embraces now the creation of identity and human development (Elkjaer, 2004). This also means moving learning into areas of conflicts and power relations (Casey, 1995; Coopey, 1995; Garrick, 1998; Fenwick, 2001; Contu and Willmott, 2003). Hence individuals are part of specific organisational practices and politics which influence their patterns of access and participation in the organisational world. “The role of individual learners is to be engaged in sense-making, and to create knowledge within and among their trajectory of participation” (Elkjaer, 2006: 21).

The argument here is that knowledge is distributed and inherent in organisational structures as well as between individuals (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001) who make sense of their worlds (Weick, 2001). Within the social perspective, however, it is not possible to see how learning occurs through participation and how to include mind and thinking in order to carry out theoretically informed actions (Elkjaer, 2004). Recently, attempts have been made to expand the participation metaphor to include a concept of knowledge that embraces acting and thinking, as well as body, emotions, power relations and intuition (Stacey, 2003; Elkjaer, 2004; Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007). Elkjaer’s (2004) ‘third way’ aims to combine the acquisition and participation metaphors for learning; OL is viewed as a mixture of skills and knowledge acquisition (product) and participation in communities of practice (process).

She refocuses OL on the concept of ‘transaction’ borrowed from John Dewey’s work (e.g. Dewey and Bentley, 1949/1991), underlying the continuous and mutual formation of both individual and organisation in social worlds. The ‘third way’ metaphor opens up the discourses to integrationist perspectives which accommodate the marriage of cognitive and interactionist views, but does not limit itself to these. Philosophical metaphors, metaphors of interdependence and complexity reside in this set alongside those of ecology and politics. Spender (1996: 66) employs the analogy of Ohm’s law to describe the interdependency of knowledge, learning and memory within a single system. For Spender (1996), like voltage, current and resistance, knowledge, learning and memory may only be understood in terms of interconnections. Metaphors of transactional dynamics and interdependency are also critical to organisational learning in the ‘third way’ (Elkjaer, 2004). Moreover, the ‘third way’ seizes non-unitary perspectives where political interests unmask struggles to achieve equity. Complexity as a metaphor set is used in Stacey’s (2001) work. He defines learning as:

... the activity of interdependent people and can only be understood in terms of self-organising communicative interaction and power relating in which identities are potentially transformed. Individuals cannot learn in isolation and organisations can never learn. (Stacey, 2003: 331)

Emergence, chaos, paradox, relating and patterns making are some of the words used to make up this new organisational discourse. Linked to complexity are ecological and evolutionary metaphors frequently applied to describe OL processes and the environment in which knowledge and learning emerge. The evolutionary metaphor set provides a language for the discussion of OL as a natural and emergent process in organisations.

Sharing within evolving communities of practice results in ecologies of knowledge. Displayed in the work of Field (2004) are metaphors around social defence, self-protection, enhancement, tension and incompatibility, metaphors which have become prominent in literatures which question the pervading optimism of mainstream OL theory. These literatures and others (e.g. Schein, 1999; Fenwick, 2003; Huzzard, 2004) disrupt notions of the supremacy of the experts and stress issues of coercion, oppression and control. The metaphors used in OL present a range of heuristic tools through which the notion might be explored. Specifically, recent metaphors underline increasingly complex treatments of the nature of OL, its emergence in patterns of human interaction and the tensions which distinguish adaptive responses.

In sum, the concept of organisational learning lacks clear definition and is 'excessively broad' (Wang and Ahmed, 2003: 8). In a critical review, Wang and Ahmed (2003) depict the concept and practice of OL as adopting a new form – one of triple-loop learning and unlearning, knowledge creation through radical change, creative thinking, competence-based strategy, organisational sustainability through creative quality and valuing innovation. Contemporary work takes a second look at OL refocusing on learning in work (Antonacopoulou et al., 2006), community involvement (Wenger, 2004), continual adaptation of shared interest groups in ontological and political interest (Field, 2004), embodiment, reflection, everyday life (Elkjaer, 2004), emotional connectedness (Fineman, 2003), and inter-subjectivity (Dovey and White, 2005).

Importantly, this new wave of literature that looks to combine pragmatism, critical theory and complexity theory with OL may be the point of departure for original research directed towards more holistic understandings of OL itself as well as of workplace experiences.

3.3 Workplace Learning as Rooted in Adult Learning

Workplace learning (WPL) discourses are rooted in adult learning with a clear focus on the individual as the learner. The key question of how adults learn has held the attention of academics and practitioners since the founding of adult education as a professional field of research in the 1920s (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2006). Some ninety years later, we have no single answer, no one theory of adult learning that clarifies all that we know about adult learners or about the learning process itself (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2006; Jarvis and Parker, 2007). The large body of adult learning literature suggests a strong relationship with the related workplace learning field of research. Adults spend a significant amount of their time at work and are often required to learn new competencies and knowledge in order to adapt to change and remain competitive in the marketplace. Adult learning is a mosaic of theories and sets of principles used as broad terms to describe how adults learn. A common theme in the literature is that adult learning is based on experience and self-directed attainments. The participation of adults in learning processes can be viewed as an informal social practice occurring through interaction with other people (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Billett, 2008) and/or in formal settings such as a university or a training centre. References to adult learning and to lifelong learning have appeared in the literature since the writings of Plato and Aristotle.

At the beginning of the last century only elite members of society attended universities or participated in formal education. It was not until the early decades of the twentieth century that adult learning was studied systematically. The empowering role of adult learning was stressed by Lindeman who stated that adult education is a 'social movement' with the purpose to "put meaning into the whole of life" (Lindeman, 1926: 5). The first book to report the results of research on this topic, Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton and Woodyard's *Adult Learning* (1928), was published just two years after the founding of adult education as a professional field of practice by Lindeman (1926). In this early literature a behavioural-psychological perspective was used to approach adult learning. That is, individuals were examined under timed conditions on various learning and memory tasks.

Intelligence tests were also promoted and together with problem solving and cognitive development they have been the focus of study by educational psychologists since the 1950s. Much of this research has not differentiated adults from children. It was not until the 1960s that lifelong learning and the importance of adult learning re-emerged in the literature. According to Evans et al. (2006) the renewed focus at the time was on reducing social and economic inequities and enhancing community development. As part of the drive to distinguish adult education from other forms of education, three of the field's most important theory-building endeavours – andragogy, self-directed learning and critical reflection – emerged. In 1968, Knowles used the term 'andragogy' ('a new label and a new technology') to describe adult learning and distinguish it from pre-adult schooling (Knowles, 1968: 351).

Andragogy which he defines as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1980: 43) is contrasted with pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn (Knowles, 1980: 43). Knowles describes adult learning as a process of self-directed inquiry and his work contributes to current theorising about adult and workplace learning. Knowles (1980) argues that adult learners have, on the basis of their reservoir of life experiences, an urge to be self-directing, decide for themselves what they need to learn, in relation to their changing social roles, and become ready to learn in a problem-centred fashion when they experience a life situation where they are motivated, by internal rather than external factors, to know something new. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed much writing and debate about the validity of andragogy as a theory of adult learning.

Between the 1970s and 1980s Knowles himself revised his thinking and moved from an andragogy versus pedagogy standpoint to depicting them on a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning. Mezirow’s (1981) development of the role of critical reflection in the process of adult learning built also on the earlier work of Knowles. For Mezirow, occurring simultaneously with self-directed learning, the notion of critical reflection refers to the adult learner’s awareness of learning, knowing and appraising. Mezirow (2009) also recognises that he has been influenced by the work of Habermas (1981) related to the critically important distinction between instrumental and communicative learning. Instrumental learning refers to the kind of learning involved in controlling or manipulating the environment, in enhancing performance or forecasting. This type of learning is validated by empirically testing our hypothetical-deductive theories (e.g. learning to build bridges, diagnose diseases).

Communicative learning refers to making sense of what individuals mean when they communicate with each other (e.g. in face-to-face encounters, through artworks). “The purpose of communicative discourse is to arrive at the best judgement, not to assess a truth claim, as in instrumental learning” (Mezirow, 2009: 91). The only alternative to this dialectical approach to understanding the meaning of our experiences is to rely on tradition, an authority or physical strength (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow also sustains that “Habermas has provided us with an epistemological foundation defining optimal conditions for adult learning and education” (Mezirow, 2009: 92). Over the next two decades, the focus shifted again and became linked to productivity and coping with technological, political and social changes of the time.

The emergence of the knowledge-based economy and the global society has attracted management theorists and HRD professionals to the concept of the ‘learning organisation’ (Senge, 1990) as a way of ensuring organisational growth and the continuous development of employees. However, in this historical context there are some critical voices too. For example, Livingstone and Sawchuck (2003) argue that while a ‘knowledge society’ may be present, vast amounts of skills and knowledge are not utilised in today’s workplaces and that we are far from experiencing a ‘knowledge economy’. While andragogy presents the individual learner as one who is autonomous, free, and growth-oriented, what one “wants to learn, what is offered, and the ways in which one learns are determined to a large extent by the nature of the society at any particular time” (Merriam et al., 2006: 5). The broad assumptions associated with the idea of adult learning are directly relevant to the present study.

Emerging from the work of Knowles (1980) and Mezirow (1981) the principles of self-directed learning and critical reflection provide a useful foundation for interpreting how adults learn in general as well as in the workplace. Nonetheless, “while andragogy may have contributed to our understanding of adults as learners, it has done little to expand or clarify our understanding of the process of learning,” nor has it achieved the status of “a theory of adult learning” (Pratt, 1993: 21). An emphasis on self-directed learning as the hallmark of adult learning can be traced back to the early 1900s when Lindeman (1926) studied the philosophy and meaning of adult learning and education, and later when Dewey (1938) described adult education as a process whereby learners become aware of practice through self-direction. Lindeman explains that:

[every] adult person finds himself [herself] in specific situations with respect to his [her] work, his [her] recreation, his [her] family life, his [her] community life, etc...-situations which call for adjustments. Adult education begins at this point. (Lindeman, 1926: 8)

According to Lindeman (1926: 169) adult education is “a process through which learners become aware of significant experiences”, and apply sense-making to these experiences. Lindeman (1926) also argues that adults are motivated to learn, that their learning is life-centred, that practice becomes the richest source of their learning, and that they have a deep need to be self-directed. Dewey (1938) characterises the adult learner as a person with emotions, needs and interests who is engaged in lifelong development. The studies of Lindeman (1926) and Dewey (1938) received renewed attention in the 1970s through the work of Tough (1971) who provided the first comprehensive description of self-directed learning as a field of research, and through the work of Knowles (1975) and Freire (1976).

Knowles suggests that “andragogy assumes that the point at which an individual achieves a self-concept of essential self-direction is the point at which he [she] psychologically becomes an adult” (Knowles, 1970: 56). The same view appears in the research of Freire (1976) who also recognises the importance of self-directed learning and sustains that learning is empowering for people. Adults are then deemed to be responsible for their own learning choices, their own lives, and learning is accomplished if intrinsic driving forces such as well-being and self-esteem are taken into account. In sum, much of the learning undertaken by adults is believed to be self-directed and informal. Adult learners are considered able to take responsibility for their own activities and to be empowered by their learning practices. As long as much of this learning is deemed to be self-directed, individuals are assumed to be capable of picking out what they need to learn and of accomplishing their goals.

In doing so, adult learners are also expected to critically reflect on their life-worlds and experiences. Therefore, it is important to provide a brief account of the role of critical reflection in adult learning. The writings of Lindeman (1926) and Mezirow (1981) stress the role of critical reflection in the process of adult learning. Critical reflection is an “understanding of the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for one’s needs, wants, and interests ... such self-knowledge is a prerequisite for autonomy in self-directed learning” (Mezirow, 1985: 27). For Mezirow (1981), individuals can become transformational learners through critical reflection by recognising that socio-cultural circumstances, including beliefs and attitudes, can affect learning processes. Both Brookfield (1993) and Collins (1996) call for a more critical, political evaluation of self-directed learning.

They emphasise the importance of the context for learning and underline the fact that oppressive external structures concur to shape self-directed learning itself. The role of critical reflection is also considered by Donald Schön (1983) who highlights the implications of reflective practice or ‘reflection-in-action’. According to Schön:

The practitioner allows himself [herself] to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he [she] finds uncertain or unique. He [she] reflects on the phenomenon before him [her], and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his [her] behaviour. He [she] carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation.

(Schön, 1983: 68)

Schön’s statement echoes Dewey’s idea of ‘surprise’ and infers that people can look at their practices, connect with their emotions and successfully adapt to new experiences. Similarly, Kolb’s (1984) ‘Learning Cycle’ refers to the process by which individuals, teams, and organisations make sense of their experiences and consequently modify their behaviour. During the ‘Learning Cycle’ people undertake tasks, reflect, conceptualise their experiences and then envisage what will happen next. Unhappy with the strictures of ‘technical rationality’ and decision-making theories Schön (1987) later introduced the concepts of ‘knowing-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ as more realistic alternatives to those strictures. According to this model practitioners instinctively (‘in the moment’) apply their ‘knowing-in-action’ to the surprises they face, and then in doing so they become involved in ‘reflection-on-action’.

The latter is the type of reflection that we might undertake after the fact, after the action has ended: making retrospective sense of how we tackled a certain problem, and specifically of how our 'knowing-in-action' may have been conducive to the unexpected surprise (Schön, 1987: 26). Schön's work plays a significant part in our understanding of both adult learning and workplace learning. Contemporary theorists such as Fenwick and Tennant (2004) and Evans et al. (2006) argue that, for learning strategies to be effective, employees must be given the appropriate skills that are needed for critical reflection to take place. According to Fenwick and Tennant (2004), this indicates that during the learning process adult learners must have the opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences, interpret what they see and hear, make personal associations and construct their own knowledge.

A key feature in Fenwick and Tennant's (2004) argumentation is that different learners construct different understandings based on their experiences and practices. In summary, this review of the large body of adult learning literature, in which workplace learning research is rooted, has investigated two principles that are considered helpful for understanding both adult learning and WPL, that is the concepts of self-direction and critical reflection. As much of adult learning is expected to be 'informal' and self-directed, individuals are assumed to be capable of identifying what they need to learn, and capable of accomplishing their goals. In doing so, adult learners are believed to critically reflect on their life-worlds and experiences.

These ideas have been particularly useful in the design of the empirical study as they have provided relevant information about the way adults learn in general as well as in the workplace.

3.4 Debating Workplace Learning

Workplace learning (WPL), like organisational learning and adult learning, is neither a unified nor a clearly defined concept. In fact, in the literature I have chosen to call WPL (Watkins, 1995) the following terms are used indiscriminately: work-based learning (Raelin, 1997); work-related learning (Van Woerkem, 2003); and learning at work (Boud and Garrick, 1999). Essentially, WPL is about individual learning in the context of work and workplaces, and although the prominence of ‘informal learning’ is stressed, WPL often embraces some kind of intentional and conscious learning practices by way of reflection on actual experiences in the workplace (Raelin 1997; Elkjaer and Wahlgren, 2006). These intentional and conscious learning practices, which are the foundations of formal education, are often linked to WPL in the related literature. Thus, in the early literature on WPL, the workplace is frequently seen as a new learning environment, suggesting that “it is the transfer of learning from schools to workplaces that is the novelty in WPL” (Elkjaer and Wahlgren, 2006: 23). However, this contextual development is more than a physical displacement from an educational setting to the workplace as a learning environment. In fact, it can be viewed as a way of contrasting the ‘old’ behaviourist paradigm for training “with a newly emerging paradigm for learning in the workplace” (Marsick, 1987: 199). This development requires members of a workforce who are able to participate in innovative practices in the workplace as well as in ‘critical reflection’ (Fenwick, 2001: 5).

This evolution is also to be connected to the more general context in which work is performed. Globalisation, new technologies, growing competition, the ageing workforce and the 'knowledge society' are some of the changes that increase requirements on almost all employees. Therefore, it has been argued that "every aspect of work, from its practical everyday organisation, its form and function in production and economy, to its meaning and value in individual and collective life, are affected by [those] changes" (Casey, 1999: 15). Some scholars in the field of WPL have emphasised that mainstream conceptualisations of learning, which have evolved in the context of formal education, are not transferable to the study of WPL. For example, Hager (2004) distinguishes two different 'paradigms' of learning, similar to the 'acquisition' and 'participation' metaphors offered by Sfard (1998), where each has distinctive epistemological premises and beliefs about knowledge.

According to Hager (2004), formal learning as found within educational systems is defined as operating through a 'standard paradigm of learning' ('learning as acquisition'). Theories within this paradigm are affected by the disciplines of cognitive and behaviourist psychology and tend, broadly speaking, to play down the importance of socio-cultural factors in workplace learning (Hager, 2004: 244). According to Hager (2004), informal learning as found in various socially informed views on learning (e.g. Wenger, 1998; Engeström, 2004) is defined as operating through an 'emerging paradigm of learning' ('learning as participation'). Within this latter perspective, learning and knowledge are seen as fluid, that is as emerging through the relationships and interactions between people, rather than as objects that are gathered, internalised and possessed.

As Sfard observes, rather than speaking of knowledge:

[the] terms that imply the existence of some permanent entities have been replaced with the noun “knowing”, which indicates action. This seemingly minor linguistic modification marks a remarkable foundational shift ... The talk about states has been replaced with attention to activities. In the image of learning that emerges from this linguistic turn, the permanence of *having* gives way to the constant flux of *doing*.

(Sfard, 1998: 6; *emphasis in original*)

Likewise, learning is perceived as involving action, doing, and active manipulation. Within their social contexts, individuals shape and remodel both themselves and the social environment in which they work. Thus, the ‘emerging paradigm’ (Hager, 2004) characterises learning as action in the world, that is as process or better as a dialectical interplay of process and product (a concept derived from the work of Dewey). This view of learning highlights its contextuality, as well as the influence of cultural and social factors. It is holistic because it points to the organic, whole-person nature of learning (Hager, 2004). Hager concludes that four major criteria for evaluating WPL theories are how well they: view such learning as a process; consider the socio-cultural and political dimensions; reflect a re-construction image; avoid single-factor or universally appropriate explanations (Hager, 2004). These ideas have been developed through social learning theories (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Engeström, 2004; Evans et al., 2006). Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, for example, that learning is contextual and intrinsic to human activity, and it occurs through processes of participation in communities of practice (e.g. sport clubs, families, work teams). According to this view, learning embraces the whole person where through participation, “agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 31).

Communities of practice include the following:

- *meaning*: a way of talking about our ability to experience our life and the world around us as meaningful;
- *practice*: a way of talking about the shared socio-historical resources that can sustain mutual engagement in action;
- *community*: a way of talking about the social arrangements in which our participation is perceived as competence;
- *identity*: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and shapes our becoming in the contexts of our communities (Wenger, 2009: 211).

Lave and Wenger's notion of community of practice has enjoyed widespread popularity within workplace learning discourses. However, some authors have begun to call attention to some weaknesses in their work.

One general criticism is that the communities of practice they study are not representative of most contemporary workplaces (Rainbird et al, 2004). Another general criticism is that issues of power, inequality and conflict are acknowledged but are not investigated (Evans et al., 2006). The focus upon the workplace as a new context for learning as well as an emergent paradigm for learning is informed by two recurrent perspectives encompassed in the concept of WPL: 1) the meaning that is attached to informal (everyday) learning; 2) an understanding of the workplace as a learning environment (in connection with issues of power, and structure/agency). The epistemological points of departure of these perspectives differ from seeing learning and knowledge as the individual's experiences to seeing them as social constructions built in groups, work teams and organisational contexts.

The focus upon informal learning is linked with the experiential tradition of Kolb (1984) and Jarvis (2007), and tends largely to be related to what it is ‘not formal’ (Colley et al., 2003). The central issue here is the importance of ‘on-the-job-learning’ which is that kind of learning not based on didactic interaction in a classroom or structured around giving lectures. The term ‘informal learning’ concerns everyday social practices and everyday knowledge, and is seen as happening outside educational settings (Colley et al., 2003). In this regard, learning is understood as a natural aspect of everyday work and work itself is understood as a productive source of learning. Marsick and Watkins state that informal learning will “take place wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning” (Marsick and Watkins, 2001: 28).

They characterise it as follows: it is integrated with daily routines; it is triggered by an internal or external jolt; it is not highly conscious; it is haphazard and influenced by chance; it is an inductive process of reflection and action; it is linked to the learning of others (Marsick and Watkins, 2001: 28). They also refer to ‘incidental learning’ which they describe as “a by-product of some other activity such as sensing the organisational culture, or trial and error experimentation” (Marsick and Watkins, 1990: 8). This is considered to be a different form of informal learning which underlines both intentional or non-intentional learning processes and the hidden and tacit dimension of knowledge itself. The ubiquity of informal learning is also generally acknowledged by other authors in the field, including those who adopt a social perspective (e.g. Colley et al., 2003; Hager, 2004).

However, this tends to be viewed as presenting a significant challenge to the idea that there should exist a distinction between formal and informal learning. For example, Billett (2002) sees learning as ubiquitous in human activity, and argues against making a distinction between formal and informal learning. He sustains that whatever people do will result in learning, structured by historical and cultural practices and micro-social processes (Billett, 2002). First, he argues that activities in the workplace are often goal-directed and intentional and, therefore, it is inaccurate to describe WPL experiences as ‘informal’.

As with educational institutions, in workplaces there are intentions for work practice, structured goal directed activities that are central to organisational continuity, and interactions and judgements about performance that are also shaped to those ends. Therefore describing learning through work as being “informal” is incorrect. (Billett, 2002: 56)

This point seems to echo the principle of performativity (Lyotard, 1984) that is, the idea that education and learning are “subjugated to a managerialist discourse of efficiency and instrumental means-end calculation” (Ellström, 2006: 33). Second, Billett moves the discussion away from the situational determinism attached to the labels of formal and informal learning. For Billett, attention should be rather paid to the structures, norms, values and activities within workplaces and how these afford opportunities for participatory learning practices. The strong suggestion of Billett’s argument is that debates over the differences between formal and informal learning obscure the discussion of more significant issues. Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm also suggest, in their study of formality and informality in learning, that in practice, “elements of both formality and informality can be discerned in most, if not all, actual learning situations” (Colley et al., 2003: 29).

They conclude that: all learning situations contain attributes of in/formality; attributes of formality and informality are interconnected in different ways in different learning situations; those attributes and their interconnections influence the nature and success of learning in any situation; and those interconnections and effects can only be properly understood if learning is investigated in relation to the wider contexts (e.g. issues of empowerment and oppression) in which it takes place (Colley et al., 2003: 65). Although most authors see informal learning within the workplace positively, some have called attention to its drawbacks (Evans et al., 2006). For example, an over-valuing of informal learning could lead to fewer opportunities for workers to participate in formal ‘off-the-job’ programmes.

Another drawback of informal learning is that research shows how sites of informal learning, such as the workplace, are unequal, with those higher up the hierarchy getting more and better opportunities for learning than those towards the bottom, who are more likely to be female or working class (Colley et al., 2003; Evans et al., 2006). The second perspective which informs discourses of WPL is the one which understands workplaces as learning environments, and which brings to the fore issues of power, and structure/agency. Here learning is connected to a specific learning context, the workplace. That learning context (‘environment’) is decisive for the learning going on, and changes in that context may impact on the learning that happens in the workplace. In addition, the employment relationship may afford or constrain the possibilities the workplace offers for learning. The workplace can be seen as “a site where workers experience the unequal power relations between themselves and the employer” (Evans et al., 2006: 5).

Thus, the workplace can be understood as an ‘expansive’ or ‘restrictive’ learning environment, in relation to the opportunities for, or barriers to, learning that it offers to employees (Evans et al., 2006). In this regard, some commentators (Billett, 2002; Ashton, 2004; Evans et al., 2006) have been concerned with how organisational structures and workplace environments form sites of engagement for individual learners and at the same time, how these fashion, afford or constrain their learning within the workplace. As is often the case, speaking about ‘organisational structures’ may be problematic as within this term there are multiple aspects involved. Whilst Ashton (2004) is interested in examining how organisational structures shape learning and the opportunities for learning in the workplace, he also calls attention to the implications of individual agency and the formal/informal interpersonal relations among employees. As Ashton notes:

... a great deal of the knowledge required for skill formation [is] transmitted in the immediate work context, through ongoing interpersonal relations. In this context the attitude and behaviour of management, supervisors and co-workers [is] crucial as they [are] all in a position to act as “gatekeepers” to knowledge. (Ashton, 2004: 48-49)

Hence it is feasible to note that, “if we wish to look at organisational structures in their own terms we need to conceptualise them in a way that ensures both official and unofficial aspects of organisational activities are covered” (Watson, 2003: 83). As Watson further explains, “structures are not objectively existing entities outside of patterns of interaction, even though it may sometimes feel as if they have this kind of forceful presence” (Watson, 2003: 5).

Thus, the formal organization of rules, procedures and goals cannot be separated from the informal organization of agency, passion and prejudice. “They are interdependent and mutually constitutive” (Grey, 2005: 29). In opposition to the rational approach, we cannot detach ethics and values from the processes of learning and organising. At the same time, we should consider that the everyday practices and processes of learning and organising carry with them both intended and unintended outcomes, a mixture of what is hoped for and what is unforeseen or undesired (Grey, 2005). It seems then that the processes through which learning within the workplace is shaped are generated through a complex structure/agency dynamic (Giddens, 1984; Reed, 2003), in which structure/agency seems more a both/and than an either/or matter.

As Giddens (1984) proposes action reproduces structure whilst structure conditions and fashions action. This means that “agency can never be written out of [organisations] and so the perfect machine-like [organisation] is a myth. We cannot necessarily predict what people will do” (Grey, 2005: 31). This section has provided an overview and critical discussion of some of the main themes and perspectives within academic literature concerning workplace learning. It has drawn on a variety of authors whose work can be identified as making a significant contribution to these areas and has illustrated some of the main issues which continue to be debated in the field. In this section, it has been shown that workplace learning is an ongoing social process where individuals and their learning contexts of work cannot really be seen as separate topics. Before proposing a ‘relational view’ of workplace learning in the last part of this chapter, the concept of ‘HRD professionals’ will be illustrated in the next section.

3.5 HRD Professionals

Human Resource Development (HRD) is an old and very large field of practice, as well as a relatively young academic discipline. It should be self-evident: organisations consist of people, and so the development of these people should be a primary task for organisations. HRD is a vital area for firms because ideas for innovation, quality and improvement come from people and not from machines (Swart et al., 2005). The extent to which individuals will provide ideas for improvement will depend, to a large extent, on HRD practices within organisations (Swart et al., 2005). HRD literature has not adequately addressed how HRD professionals experience the interplay between emotions and workplace learning. This study tries to fill, in part, that gap.

As established earlier, HRD professionals deal with issues that are complex and involve recurrent human interactions, such as issues of, for example, age, gender, ethnicity, ethics, disability, sexuality, power as well as human development and learning. This latter topic is becoming more of a strategic organisational challenge. In fact, much of our learning takes place within social contexts where the behaviour of others influences our own learning. In particular, within workplaces it has been the duty of management to identify and organise training activities, normally together with HRD professionals. In recent years, the emphasis has shifted from training to development and learning, so that related activities embrace both the traditional planned and structured training tasks and the informal and incidental learning experienced in the workplace.

Also, with the decline of lifetime employment and the rapid speed of change, it seems to be essential for employees to learn continuously throughout their working lives in order to cope with changes and to remain attractive for employers (Tjepkema et al., 2002). This new emphasis on learning poses challenges for HRD professionals as they should support the development of organisations and create opportunities for workplace learning for employees. “As organisations develop into learning-oriented organisations, this has a profound impact on the relationship between work and learning. Whereas learning used to be primarily equalled to training, it now becomes predominantly associated with learning from experience, and self-directed learning. Similarly, learning is no longer regarded as a classroom activity, but primarily as something that takes place on-the-job as a continuous, on-going activity” (Tjepkema et al., 2002: 13).

The result is that now the responsibility for learning is being viewed as a shared responsibility between employers and employees (Swart, 2005). This new view of learning greatly affects the role and tasks of HRD professionals, who are involved in the delivery of training activities and in the creation of a learning climate in the workplace. The role generally attributed to HRD professionals is that of consultants to line managers on how to promote and encourage employees’ WPL, and how to link this WPL to organisational goals (Tjepkema et al. 2002). The word ‘trainer’ (as HRD professionals are often called) is no longer an adequate description of their activity. As organisations have to respond to changing environmental circumstances, HRD has a strategic role to play in helping in the development and response to ongoing change. These increasing requests for continuous development present huge challenges for organisations and HRD providers.

“The concept of ‘continuous development’ presupposes that people must learn from real experiences at work and everyday life, rather than occasional injections of training” (Swart, 2005: 139). In this regard, workplace learning can be a valuable method where the skills, dispositions and knowledge learnt are immediately relevant to the job being carried out. The new role of HRD professionals will be, therefore, that of strategic learning facilitators or change agents (Watkins and Marsick, 1993; Tjepkema et al., 2002; Swart et al., 2005). In general, the field of HRD appears to be moving from an isolated business function to a more strategic role in today’s organisations. From a UK perspective, the aims of HRD can be defined as “supporting and facilitating the learning of individuals, groups and organisations” (McGoldrick et al., 2002: 396).

Much American HRD literature tends to be influenced by a “predominantly performative and learning-outcome focus of the HRD field” (Elliott and Turnbull, 2002: 971), and situated within a unitary organisation perspective, avoiding any indication of the tensions inherent in work organisations. This latter perspective depicts HRD as unproblematic and adopts a prescriptive and idealistic rather than critical orientation; here the political dimension and implicit power imbalances are absent. However, a critical perspective is emerging in recent years which challenges the predominantly performative and learning-outcome focus of the HRD discipline (Elliott and Turnbull, 2002; McGoldrick et al. 2002; Sambrook, 2003; Fenwick, 2005). Critical authors adopt an ‘oppositional’ stance (Burrell, 2001: 14) by rejecting traditional approaches to HRD practices and uncovering their shortcomings (Sambrook, 2003).

These shortcomings can include a neglect of the political dimension, an acceptance of what is taken for granted, an incapacity to examine the opinions of the suppressed or excluded, or an uncritical adherence to mainstream theories and methodologies (Sambrook, 2003). In this regard, Sambrook (2003) argues that HRD can usefully be thought of as a social and discursive construction, in an attempt to bring together the two concepts of HRD as ‘action’ and HRD as just ‘all talk’. This leads to the notion of HRD as something that is both enacted and negotiated (Sambrook, 2003). Bierema and Cseh add that:

HRD focuses little on issues of social justice in the workplace or larger social context. Women’s experiences as well as those of other diverse groups is ignored, as are asymmetrical power arrangements. Gender/race/ethnicity is not used as a category of analysis – even when data are collected by gender. Organisational ‘undiscussables’ such as sexism, racism, patriarchy, and violence receive little attention in the literature yet have considerable impact on organisational dynamics. Finally, HRD research has only weakly advocated change. (Bierema and Cseh, 2003: 23-24)

Like Sambrook in the UK, Bierema and Cseh in the USA insist that critical views are needed in HRD practice and research. In particular, they demand greater critical analysis of how HRD represents power relations in organisations, for questions about ‘who benefits’ from HRD, and for approaches that address gender and equity matters. For some critics, HRD practices discipline through surveillance and soft power, in a form of cultural engineering with questionable ethics (Townley, 1994). “Even human hearts and, increasingly, souls are treated as raw capital to be harnessed for [organisational] gain, claim HRD critics” (Fenwick, 2005: 226). Brookfield (2001) suggests re-engaging the ideology critique of critical theory with pragmatism: focusing on empirical improvement of modern conditions.

Brookfield sustains that a pragmatic approach helps ensure the flexibility and responsiveness of critical practice to its contingencies: it neither creates a new orthodoxy nor overlooks its own reflexivity (Brookfield, 2001). Nonetheless, the problem of how to conceive an integration of critical theory with organisational practices continues to trouble (Fenwick, 2005). Fenwick proposes that critical HRD professionals as intermediaries (between employers and employees) might serve as “translators or process interpreters” (Fenwick, 2005: 232). “In this role they might draw explicit attention to the conflicting language, identity reinforcers and norms of engagement between management and [labour], even suggest alternative modes of dialogue” (Fenwick, 2005: 232-233).

Townley (1994) also urges HRD professionals to reflexively examine their own practices and remain critically attentive to issues of voice, equity, imbalanced interests, and the manipulative power embedded in their own activities. In fact, in the HRD field, learning has been recognised as embedded in everyday work practices (Fenwick, 2010). Thus, Fenwick (2010) suggests that an understanding of workplace learning within HRD theory can be usefully enriched by incorporating more fully practice-based theories derived from natural sciences, social and organisational studies, such as ‘complexity science’ (Davis and Sumara, 2006), ‘cultural-historical activity theory’ (Engeström, 2001) and ‘actor-network theory’ (Latour, 2005). For HRD, these perspectives point to explicit multiple dimensions of workplace learning that can be useful in analysing practical problems and developing solutions (Fenwick, 2010).

One example would be an organisational change initiative which would encourage experimentation among people and objects involved in the change instead of training individuals to ‘acquire’ knowledge of the new policy (Fenwick, 2010). In other words, in order to make sense of human learning and change in rapidly fluctuating work contexts, “we must examine the whole system of continuities cut across by discontinuities at play” (Fenwick, 2010: 38). It seems feasible to conclude that the foundations for a critical HRD profession may include aims of workplace reform associated with equity, justice, organisational democracy; knowledge and workplace learning treated as contested and non-performative; inquiry centred on denaturalising organisational power; methods of reflexivity and a critical stance on prevailing conditions (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Fenwick, 2005). The next section introduces the ‘relational view’.

3.6 A Relational View

Definition is difficult. “The terms *work* and *workplace* are problematic, for their conventional usage tends to ignore important spheres of unpaid work in homes and communities and to assume that work is based in unitary, identifiable, geographically [organised] places and activities” (Fenwick, 2001: 3-4). Therefore, a workplace can be, for example, an organisation, a website, a kitchen table or a car, while work can be, for example, public or private, paid or unpaid, in or out of the home. As we have seen, learning is also a very complex and problematic matter, and there is no generally accepted definition of the concept. In particular, workplace learning is here understood as the natural, daily ongoing learning process that is intimately connected to the work process (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Van Woerkem, 2003).

Workplace learning implies the development of human change or growth that is embodied and embedded in daily practices, action and conversation and which unfolds in contexts of work, however it is defined and located (Fenwick, 2008). There is no separation between thinking and acting at work, and learning (Billett, 2008). Although there is no one perspective able to fully capture the complexities of these issues, in order to better understand them it is argued here that all learning includes the interplay of three dimensions (Illeris, 2007): *cognition* (the content of meaning); *emotion* (the psychodynamic process); and *sociality* (the interaction between the individual and the environment). All of these three dimensions are embedded in a socio-politically situated context (Illeris, 2007).

I have special regard in this study for the so-called practice-based (or social) perspective on workplace learning (Wenger, 1998; Gherardi, 2006) and, notably, for the ‘relational’ approach to WPL (Stacey, 2001; Elkjaer, 2004; Billett, 2008) which combines the acquisition (product) and participation (process) metaphors for learning (Sfard, 1998). This approach emphasises the ‘relational interdependence’ between personal and social agency (Billett, 2008), in order to not reduce structure to agency nor agency to structure (Reed, 2003). A central premise of the relational view presented here is that meaning is shaped in the process of interaction with other people in social situations (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Giddens, 1984; Gergen, 1995; Archer, 2000), in terms of “... joined and separated ... episodes of co-present interaction” (Denzin, 1984: 61).

Human interaction is an ongoing achievement in which people are constantly in a process of ‘becoming’ (Watson, 2001: 223), that is in “emergent relational interactions and patterns that are recursively intimated in the fluxing and transforming of our life-worlds” (Chia, 1996: 581-582). Put simply, human beings “are making their worlds at the same time as their worlds are making them” (Watson, 2001: 223). This process of emergence for human beings can be seen first and foremost as a process of continual learning (Watson, 2001). Workplace learning then can be understood in terms of co-participation in work activities and conceptualised as a relational and negotiated interdependence between social and personal factors (Billett, 2008: 39). That is, “workers need to engage in the socioculturally-derived and supported practices that make up the workplace in order to secure the knowledge required for work ” (Billett, 2008: 40).

This process of development which implies learning and change is relational. On the one hand, the capacity of the social world to secure its suggestion is limited by individual interpretations and enactments (Valsiner, 2000; Billett, 2008). On the other hand, an individual’s personal agency is limited by “what possibilities of enacting their work affords them” (Billett, 2008: 40). As a result, the negotiations between workers’ earlier experiences and immediate experiences of the workplace establish an interplay between “personal and social agency best conceptualised as a relational interdependence” (Billett, 2008: 41). The point here is that work is enacted and remade, and learning achieved by human beings as they deploy their abilities, interests and values in their work practices.

Individuals' thinking is likely to be intentional and directed and can never be a faithful reproduction of social projections, because those projections are never complete or unambiguous (Berger and Luckman, 1967). As Giddens notes social systems "do not reproduce themselves, they require the active production and reproduction of human subjects" (Giddens, 1984: 114). Therefore, it seems that a balance between social and individual contributions plays a central role in theories of workplace learning (Billett, 2008). Hence it follows that individuals need to be conceived of as being personally agentic, yet socially shaped over time (Mead, 1913). This relational interdependence that constitutes learning, work and employees may be conceptualised as negotiation. That is, individual employees' participative learning practices are transacted through their agentic conduct and engagement within those social practices.

An understanding of this transaction or relation as the continuous formation of individuals and environment, in a process of co-becoming, can be closely related to the work of John Dewey. For Dewey (1938), in this transactional/relational way, thinking and learning are instrumental in action, and they are never to be understood as isolated personal mind processes but always as part and parcel of transactional relations between people and environment. Dewey (1938) also claims that learning is embodied, that is it involves the emotional, the physical and the practical, and these are interconnected not separate. Within this framework, learning is viewed and acted out as an embodied process based on "the inseparability between a particular way of being and the way the world appears to us [so that] *every act of knowing brings forth a world*" (Maturana and Varela, 1998: 26).

Embodied learning “depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history” (Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 1991: 149), that is, what we come to know is based upon our observer-dependent human nature. This is so “not because the perceiver “constructs” it as he or she pleases, but because what counts as a relevant world is inseparable from the structure of the receiver” (Varela, 1999: 13). The corporeally constituted status of perceiving observers/learners, with their embodied pre-interpretations and situated embedment, provides the related ontological foundations for workplace learning, and connected acting in organisations (Küpers, 2008). This understanding of WPL as an embodied practice corresponds to the ‘practice turn’ in contemporary theory (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Schatzki et al., 2001), and practice-based theorising on workplace learning (Nicolini et al., 2003; Gherardi, 2006).

Nevertheless, within the evolving practice-based literature on WPL, learning has come to be regarded as a social process, occurring through participation in ongoing activities within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). By reducing learning and knowing to the social practices that produce them, the practice-based approach seems to ignore the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ of learning (Elkjaer, 2004), as well seeming to assign too passive a role to individuals (Billett, 2008). So, there is a need to go beyond this account of WPL and recognise the ‘relational interdependence’ between individual and social agency (Billett, 2008). As already noted, it appears that individuals need to be conceived of as being personally agentic, yet socially shaped over time (Mead, 1913).

When individuals and their social environments are connected to each other on the basis of a relational interdependence, time and space are inseparable. In a relational understanding of the connection between individuals and organisations, the unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the organisation but the ‘transaction’, that is the ‘problematic situation’ or the ‘organisational event’ (Elkjaer, 2004). As Elkjaer explains:

The situation or event is contextual and unfolds over time, and it is a unity of intertwined and complex phenomena whose parts are mutually penetrating and inseparable. (Elkjaer, 2004: 427)

This relational perspective interprets embodied learning as “an emerging event, that is, as a dispersed and inherently indeterminate process, which is continually reconfiguring itself” (Küpers, 2008: 397).

Within this perspective, workplace learning becomes factually based upon embodied relational processes that are jointly or dialogically patterned activities (Shotter, 1993; Stacey, 2001; Cunliffe, 2008). It is important to note that the ‘relational view’ illustrated in this thesis is deemed to be a useful way of framing reality, more useful, say, than other ways. It is not being argued that the ‘relational view’ is right or true: it is argued, in pragmatist terms, that there are practical advantages in moving towards relational ways of framing reality, because they “use concepts that help us critically engage with the world” (Watson, 2006: 27). The spirit of the relational view proposed here is summarised below (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 The process-relational view of people (adapted from Watson, 2006: 94).

- People are *relational* beings: their individuality only becomes possible as a result of relating to others.
 - People are always in a process of ‘becoming’: they have *emergent identities*.
 - People *enact* the world. In the light of the *language* and understandings of their *culture*, individuals actively *make sense* of the *ambiguous* world of which they are a part, and then act in the light of these *interpretations*.
 - Actions take place, in the light of interpretations made about the world, to *enact* whatever *projects* people are undertaking *strategically* to *shape their lives* and to manage *existential challenges*.
 - Knowledge and understandings about the world are negotiated as people work together at making sense about the world – with some people being more influential than others in establishing ‘how things are’.
 - People have continuously *emergent orientations* towards various aspects of the world, which shift as people come to terms with changing situations and make sense of them in the light of their life-shaping and situational projects and in the light of the *discourses* and *linguistic resources* available to them in the culture.
 - Remembering involves *reconstructing* experiences or knowledge in the light of current circumstances and the *narratives* about the world which are available in the culture with which people engage.
 - Rationality and *emotion* are simultaneously involved in all thought and action; rational analysis and decision making cannot occur unaffected by feelings and values – but *reflective reasoning* is possible which takes into account that feelings and values are part of it.
 - **Learning** is a process of changing – through experience, dialogues and ‘negotiation of realities’ with others – understandings of how the world ‘works’ and how one can skilfully operate within that world.
-

Thus WPL develops out of a complex set of transactions or inter-relations between subjects and objects as an ongoing course of events of relating and responding (Stacey, 2001; Küpers, 2008). Out of these relations then emotions, meanings and communities, as well as artefacts and structures of WPL, are continually co-created, re-created, negotiated and re-negotiated (Küpers, 2008). Overall, multiple dimensions involved in workplace learning need to be recognised. Identity issues are very much integrated in how people see themselves as learners and in how they perform knowledge (Fenwick, 2010). Language is key to how people experience and represent knowledge, and to how they make sense of their practices (Fenwick, 2010).

These practices, understood as the everyday socio-cultural routines in which individuals participate, embed symbols, values and goals that establish what counts as workplace learning and what is useful knowledge (Fenwick, 2010). Power relations determine hierarchies of knowledge within a community, establish who gets to judge workplace learning, who has access to knowledge and who can take part in knowledge creation (Fenwick, 2010). By a relational approach, which emphasises the relation rather than the separation, the splitting of body and mind, the division between the individual and the social, and the division between agency and structure can be, at least in part, integrated by processes of co-relating both sides of these three common dualisms (Hodkinson, Biesta, James, 2008). In a relational view, these dualisms do not exist independently of each other.

Not only is our workplace learning embodied and enacted in practice but, as the body is the medium for our workplace learning, this type of learning is also coloured by race, gender and sexuality (Casey, 2000; Brewis and Linstead, 2004; Gherardi, 2006). When the focus is on workplace learning, the meaning of this embodied view of learning is clear, for much of what is learned at work involves practical activity and reflective action. Furthermore, WPL is also social and Mead (1913) shows that the social is not ‘outside’ the individual but exists in and through interaction, participation and communication in communities of individuals (Biesta, 1999). The lived body provides then “a point of connection between the individual and social, as race, gender and sexuality are socially constructed notions, as well as biologically based” (Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009: 1358).

In sum, it appears that by taking the various inter-relational dimensions of workplace learning into account, a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon can be gained, as long as being-in-the-world entails the whole human being with her/his thoughts, bodily activities, emotions and power relations. The next section illustrates the connections between emotions and workplace learning.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored some major themes and influential paradigms in the debate over the history of workplace learning. It has been shown that this subject area is strictly connected to the concepts of organisational learning (OL) and adult learning (AL). It has been firstly discussed organisational learning which refers to the study of learning processes within organisations from an academic viewpoint (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003). Secondly, it has been illustrated the concept of adult learning which refers to theories and principles used as broad terms to describe how adults learn. Thirdly, it has been pointed out that, broadly speaking, we can distinguish two different paradigms in the debate over WPL: learning as acquisition and learning as participation (Sfard, 1998; Elkjaer, 2004; Hager, 2004). Theories within the first paradigm ('acquisition') are affected by the disciplines of cognitive and behaviourist psychology and tend, in general terms, to play down the importance of socio-cultural factors in WPL (Hager, 2004). Within the second paradigm ('participation') learning and knowledge are seen as fluid, that is as emerging through social interaction, rather than as objects that are gathered, internalised and possessed.

After debating these different theories, it has been shown how, recently, the emphasis on HRD issues has shifted from training to development and learning, so that related activities now embrace both the traditional planned and structured training tasks and the informal and incidental learning experienced in the workplace. This new emphasis seems to direct the foundations for a critical HRD profession towards aims of workplace reform associated with equity, justice, organisational democracy and inquiry centred on denaturalising organisational power (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Fenwick, 2005).

Finally, a 'relational view' of WPL has been presented in this chapter. In this regard, it has been stressed that WPL implies the development of human change or growth that is embodied and embedded in daily practices, action, and conversation and which unfolds in contexts of work, however it is defined and located (Fenwick, 2008). There is no separation between thinking and acting at work, and learning (Billett, 2008). Moreover, it has been underlined that this relational view (Stacey, 2001; Elkjaer, 2004; Billett, 2008) combines the acquisition (product) and participation (process) metaphors for learning (Sfard, 1998). The emphasis has been, therefore, on the 'relational interdependence' between personal and social agency (Billett, 2008), in order to not reduce structure to agency nor agency to structure (Reed, 2003). While this chapter aimed to set a conceptual framework for WPL, the next chapter will deal with the connections between emotions and workplace learning which is the main focus of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONNECTING EMOTIONS and WORKPLACE LEARNING

4.1 Introduction

Workplace learning remains an area of theory and practice in which we are only beginning to attend to the powerful role that emotions play in our lives. This study seeks to focus on the emotional self in workplace learning, showing how these two phenomena are closely connected. In particular, emotions can be seen, to some degree, as learned experiences, and workplace learning can also be seen, to some degree, as an emotional experience. This study suggests that emotions are the product of both natural evolution and socio-cultural nurturing (Prinz, 2004). But in this chapter, the focus will be on this latter point, because the socio-cultural view underlines the fact that emotions are, mostly or in part, learned features of behaviour, and because it encourages an increasing understanding of the impact of learning on emotions (Fineman, 1997). The socio-cultural content provides the rules and vocabularies of emotion management and emotional display for different audiences: self, loved one, boss, colleagues, and so on. It is argued here that emotions “cannot be fully understood outside of their social context ... [and there] is so much that is learned, ‘social’, ... cultural specific, in the meaning and production of emotions, that strictly biological ... explanations soon lose their potency” (Fineman, 1993: 10). At the same time WPL can be seen, to some degree, as an emotional experience. Learning at work involves our whole person, that is our body as well as our emotional self. It looks as if emotions and learning “are coupled for us from birth, ... [and as learning] arouses emotions ... emotions arouse learning” (Brown, 2000: 288).

At the intersection between emotions and workplace learning lies or better emerges the ‘embodied-relational being’. First, in *being*, we are in action, carrying with us a past as we progress through the present into a becoming (Gergen, 2009). As individual human beings we are *relational*, because we are always emerging from relationships. We are also *embodied* human beings “the body is our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 146). We exist then as embodied-relational beings in social relations and, in this context, we become selves who participate in a world of others that is formed by history and culture (Burkitt, 2008). Fundamentally, this chapter suggests that emotions and workplace learning are intimately connected, for learning is a “labour of love ... yet, love itself must be cultivated and developed through learning” (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001: 444-445). This is the way in which this connection will be developed in this chapter.

4.2 Emotions as Learned Experiences

The tasks of defining, classifying and making sense of emotions have intrigued and puzzled intellectuals for a long time. In the light of ancient Greeks’ preoccupation with *paideia* (‘culture’ and ‘education’), Greek philosophers argued strongly on the relationship between *pathos* (‘emotion’) and *logos* (‘reason’), and encouraged individuals to be in touch with and cultivate both of them (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001). Nonetheless, emotions and reason have long stood at opposite ends of philosophical theories of human beings (Putnam and Mumby, 1993; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002). In the *Phaedrus*, Plato depicted emotions as irrational urges that need to be controlled through the use of reason, and as major impediments to rationality and the search for truth (Jaggar, 1989).

In the 17th century, Spinoza's account of the emotions completely inverted Plato's viewpoint and the Cartesian primacy given to reason and the mind (Brown and Stenner, 2001). Spinoza considered drives, motivations, emotions and feelings - an ensemble he called 'affects' - as an essential aspect of humanity (Damasio, 2003). For Spinoza, emotions were not located in a separate body in conflict with the mind, since body and mind are features of a single reality; but emotions, especially joy and sorrow, make the difference between the best or the worst lives, for they either enhance our power to act or diminish that power. William James posed the question 'What is an emotion?' back in 1884. More than 120 years later, this question remains unanswered, because "the phenomena to which *emotion* or *emotional* is attached appear to be diverse. Also, there is no agreement about which phenomena there are" (Frijda, 1986: 1).

William James proposed that emotions are specific feelings caused by changes in our physiological conditions. For example, when we perceive that we are in danger, this perception triggers a set of bodily responses, and our perception of these responses is what constitutes fear. For James, "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and [it is] not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry or fearful, as the case may be" (James, 1884: 190). It appears that one problem with this theory is that it is unable to explain differences among emotions. At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud marked the study of emotions with their seminal works.

Darwin (1872) introduced the bio-evolutionary theory, suggesting that emotional behaviour or action patterns are adaptive reactions to specific experiences, and they accompany particular emotions because of their value in communicating these emotions to other people. Darwin “aimed to show evolutionary continuity in the facial expressions of humans and animals and thus, by implication, evolutionary continuity in the emotions underlying those expressions” (Griffiths, 2003: 291). Following Darwin’s approach, Paul Ekman (1972) takes emotional expressions, that is “those potentially observable surface changes in face, voice, body, and activity level” (Lewis, 2008: 310), to be significant parts of innate ‘affect programs’, which are complex responses (‘basic emotions’) found in all human cultures and populations. Although there is no definitive agreement among scientists, these ‘basic emotions’ are generally assumed to be: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust. Ekman (1972) considers facial expressions as components of ‘affect programs’.

However, the ‘basic emotions’ approach leaves out a great deal. In particular, it ignores those emotions which entail higher cognitive processes, such as, for example, jealousy and envy, as well overlooking the fact that emotional expressions are subject to wide socio-cultural experiences and influences. Thus, the relationship between emotional expressions and states remains somewhat vague (Lewis, 2008). Another important contribution to the study of emotions is Freud’s original work on psychoanalysis. For Freud, human behaviour is prompted by both conscious and unconscious mental processes. While we are conscious of emotional expressions, we may be largely unaware of the unconscious dimension, one in which both ideas and emotions may operate (Freud, 1986).

Unconscious ideas, hopes and emotions will often reach the conscious dimension in highly unclear, distorted or disguised ways, necessitating interpretation (Freud, 1986). “Psychoanalysis views a substantial part of human motivation and action as unconsciously driven..., [and] psychoanalytic authors view [organisations] as emotional cauldrons where fantasies, desires and passions lead a precarious co-existence with plans, calculations and the application of scientific thinking” (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002: 217). Thus, psychoanalysis underlines “the relative imperviousness of certain emotions to learning” (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002: 218). Contemporary efforts to study the connections between emotions and learning have led to debates of whether emotions are innate or learned.

It seems that recently there has been a rapprochement between these two perspectives (Armstrong, 2000), and in this regard, it has been suggested that the dichotomy between the two perspectives cannot be maintained, because every emotion is the product of both natural evolution and socio-cultural nurturing (Prinz, 2004). This thesis suggests a more central and holistic role of emotions in reason, rationality, learning and meaning making (Jarvis, 2007; Merriam et al., 2006), and as noted above, it stresses the fact that emotions are multi-dimensional phenomena which arise within power relationships, and that they have a corporeal, embodied aspect as well as a socio-cultural one (Burkitt, 1997). But in this section, it is worth focusing on the latter. The socio-cultural aspect underlines the fact that emotions are, mostly or in part, learned features of behaviour, and it encourages an increasing understanding of the impact of learning on emotions (Fineman, 1997; Höpfl and Linstead, 1997).

Moreover, in socio-cultural terms, emotionality is often gendered and defined “within a male power structure that values “emotional strength”, meaning suppression of and control over emotions” (Domagalski, 1999: 836). Within this perspective, emotions cannot be reduced to biology or discourse alone, but belong to all these dimensions as they emerge in ongoing relational practices (Burkitt, 1997). In particular, it is argued that emotions “cannot be fully understood outside of their social context ... [there] is so much that is learned, ‘social’, interpretive, culturally specific, in the meaning and production of emotions, that strictly biological, in-the-body, explanations soon lose their potency” (Fineman, 1993: 10).

This means that the socio-cultural content provides the rules and vocabularies of emotional display for different audiences: self, loved one, boss, colleagues, and so on. Learning to be very careful and fearful as an emotional response to encountering a mountain bear is, for example, the result of a learned meaning schema. Emotions, as a system of reactions, are clearly affected by the way an individual makes sense of a situation. Workplace situations continuously create emotional responses affected by the way in which they are interpreted. For example, an employee may welcome the introduction of a new e-learning course, because she/he understands its usefulness and feels confident in using it. On the other hand, if the employee has no previous experience in e-learning courses and is not convinced of its usefulness, she/he may feel anxious about its introduction. In every case, one’s existing knowledge, values, interpretations and emotional states may lead to positive or negative emotions that would result in different responses.

As Shibles argues:

... emotion depends on intellectual assessment, reason, the ways in which we are able to view the situation the possible choices which are open to us.

Emotion depends on our knowledge and understanding. It depends on our knowledge of emotive, ethical concepts, and on our knowledge of cause and effect relations. To have a successful emotional life one needs intellectual inquiry. (Shibles, 1974: 50)

This places knowledge and learning as central features of emotional and social development. “Learning informs individuals of the ways they relate to others, allowing them to empathise and understand their emotions and enables them to take appropriate action in pursuit of their aims” (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001: 442). Thus the way individuals make sense of and experience their emotions is largely affected by their learning, that is by the way they utilise their knowledge to inform their understanding (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001). As a social domain, the workplace has been a subject of inquiry within sociological investigations, including the emotional facets of work settings (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton, 2005). As already seen in Chapter Two, much of the progression in the consideration of emotions in organisations can be attributed to Hochschild’s seminal work on ‘The Managed Heart’ (1983). The ‘smile factories’ (Van Manen, 1991) have their ‘rules’ and employees often have to work hard on their emotions in order to learn and conform to the company’s feeling and display rules (Goffman, 1967; Hochschild, 1983; Bolton, 2005). Being part of organisational culture and socialisation, ‘feeling rules’ influence the manner in which feelings are interpreted. In conjunction with feeling rules, ‘display rules’ serve as guides to the appropriate emotional display in a given situation (Hochschild, 1983; Thoits, 1989).

For example, one is expected to feel sad at funerals in Italy. Sadness, then, would be the proper emotion to experience according to cultural feeling rules. The appropriate emotional display, in this case, is also sadness. Although this is not the case in all cultures, it seems that it is really the case in our Western societies. These emotional rules, that is feeling and display rules, are both learned and shaped by political, educational, professional and organisational social contexts (Fineman, 2003). The shared conventions and expectations developed within these social contexts regulate not only which emotions can be displayed, but also regulate the intensity of emotional display, which emotions can be shown to whom, the specific mode of emotional display and even the place where emotions may be displayed (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989).

Organisations also seek to employ people who can convey emotions considered to be appropriate for the role (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987). A major part of the labour involved in a newcomer's socialisation process is the labour of learning the emotional rules of the new organisational culture. For example, in the Disney tradition, newcomers learn the sharp distinction between being 'onstage' (where clients can go) and being 'off-stage' (where only employees can go) (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987). When onstage, employees must follow guidelines about which emotions can be displayed (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Bryman, 1995). Moreover, Leidner (1993: 69) observes that, at Hamburger University, McDonald's employees are instructed to "be enthusiastic and smile" as they greet customers. Emotional display rules are often implicit and are therefore learned through the 'informal organisation', that is through socio-cultural interactions with more established group members (Turnbull, 2002).

The stories told and actions taken by these more established group members ('role models') provide opportunities for social learning (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory also indicates that newcomers learn about emotional display by observing and then imitating those 'role models' (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987). Employees not only learn which emotions should be displayed to clients, and which suppressed or disguised, they also learn which emotions should be displayed in the presence of colleagues (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987). Thus emotion cultures provide guidelines by which individuals make sense of their worlds (Thoits, 1989). Further, emotion cultures are not static, they change over time (Lofland, 1985), and individuals are socialised into emotion cultures differently based on gender and social status (Thoits, 1989; Putnam and Mumby, 1993).

A 'good' emotional performance is then learnable, because it is directed by cultural scripts, but there are also possibilities of severe disjuncture between private feelings and emotional displays (Fineman, 1997). "When individuals do break rules of feeling and display, they experience negative emotions, particularly embarrassment and shame ..., and they become highly motivated to repair their breach of cultural prescriptions and proscriptions" (Turner and Stets, 2006: 26). Emotional rules govern emotion management by defining emotions. Emotion management then is learnt through socialisation, which reflects the socio-cultural factors of the society into which individuals are born (Theodosius, 2006). However, individuals have the capacity to make sense of and work with alternative interpretations of the world around them (Goffman, 1967; Bolton, 2005). Clark (1997) has shown, for example, that individuals may manipulate emotional displays in games of micro-politics to gain power in interactions.

Psychoanalytic approaches also warn that, while emotions have socio-cultural implications and may be civilised, shaped and controlled as a result of learning, they may remain in part unmanaged and unmanageable (Craib, 1998; Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001). In sum, the socio-cultural perspective emphasises the importance of culture in defining which emotions are to be learned and displayed in different situations. The emotion culture constrains the actions of individuals on a stage in front of audiences, and yet individuals do have some degree of flexibility to engage in strategic actions (Turner and Stets, 2006: 27).

4.3 Workplace Learning as an Emotional Experience

Since ancient times, reason and rationality have been viewed as the primary foundations for learning processes (Jaggar, 1989). This marginalised view of emotions has continued to the present day, and adult educators often refer to personal or emotional issues individuals bring to educational settings as ‘baggage’ or ‘barriers’ to learning (Dirkx, 2001). Nevertheless, many of us implicitly recognise emotional aspects of learning as also contributing to positive educational experiences. For example, learning under the guidance of a loved teacher or a respected manager can be perceived as a positive human experience. Although emotions are recognised as essential elements of what is learned and how it is learned (Boud et al., 1993; Tennant, 1997), our understanding of how emotions contribute to workplace learning processes is limited. This thesis argues that all learning includes the interplay of three dimensions: cognition, emotion and sociality (Illeris, 2007). All of these three dimensions are embedded in a socio-culturally situated context (Illeris, 2007).

In fact, it has been observed that learning both reflects and produces emotions, as well as emotions infuse processes of doing and learning with a special sense of 'flow' (Fineman, 2003: 561). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) describes 'flow' as a state of being totally immersed in an activity, so that one may lose track of time and space. It has been sustained that emotions are sources of energy which provide motivation for cognitive processes and are helpful in development (Piaget, 1981). For Piaget (1981), love of truth lies behind most human learning. More (1974) also suggests that real learning takes place when one exercises and realises all three dimensions of learning, namely the cognitive, the behavioural and the affective (or emotional). When this full process takes place in interactions, "then the resultant activity or change is learning" (More, 1974: 134).

The affective dimension of learning is involved in "the emotional evaluation of perception and cognition" (More, 1974: 137). More portrays the affective dimension as the 'Cinderella of learning' (More, 1974: 137), and stresses the fact that a balance must be achieved, with emotions playing their part alongside cognition and behaviour. More also contends that before learning can take place people must resolve some kind of emotional conflict. He develops this point saying that 'conflict' is necessary "because an attitude has a 'feeling' component ... [and attitudes] are an amalgam of cognitive, affective and potential action elements" (More, 1974: 33-34). We experience conflict because what we think at a cognitive level is not consonant with what we feel at an affective level (More, 1974). Learning then is itself a deeply emotional process, guided and shaped by different emotions, including fear, hope, anxiety, curiosity and interest, arranged in relatively long-lasting clusters (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001).

Postle (1993) reinforces that view arguing that emotional dimensions provide the foundations on which practical, conceptual and imaginal modes of learning rest. Postle states that the emotional (or affective) mode of learning is that of learning by encounter, which finds “expression through ‘being there’, through immersion in an experience” (Postle, 1993: 33). Postle builds his argument on the work of Heron who depicts the psyche as having four modes of functioning that “are all in play to some degree at all times in waking life” (Heron, 1992: 14). The ground process of the psyche starts from the affective mode and proceeds through the imaginal, the conceptual and the practical to return to the affective, and so on (Heron, 1992).

Emerging from these modes of the psyche are four kinds of learning: the experiential, the presentational, the propositional and the practical. Experiential learning is acquiring knowledge of being (‘felt participation’) and is rooted in the affective mode of the psyche that is home to feelings and emotions. Presentational learning is connected to the imaginal mode in which intuition, imagination and perception reside. Propositional learning is rooted in the conceptual mode, and it is expressed in intellectual statements (verbal and numeric). Practical learning is acquiring knowledge of how to practise specific skills. Heron (1992) suggests then that the whole person is involved in the learning process, including feelings and emotions. “When learners engage in learning as whole persons they engage each other in the affective and imaginal modes of their psyche as well as the conceptual and practical” (Short and Yorks, 2002: 86). In this regard, it seems that empathy, understood here as “a set of constructs that connects the responses of one individual to the experiences of another” (Davis, 2007: 443), may enable learning at work.

That requires the creation of a climate of ‘learning-within-relationship’, including the establishment of an ‘empathic field’ that allows learners to adequately share and mutually make sense of the felt experiential knowing of other people (Short and Yorks, 2002). ‘Learning-within-relationship’ refers to people “who are fully engaged with their own whole-person knowing as well as the dynamic whole person of their fellow participants in the learning process” (Short and Yorks, 2002: 86). In addition, it has been observed that “[while] our behaviour becomes more sophisticated as we grow older, ... when faced with difficult learning situations, ... [adults] try to avoid having to struggle with uncertainty, yearn for simple answers, become angry when frustrated and easily give up the struggle” (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983: 54).

Edgar Schein believes that all learning is essentially coercive, because “you either have no choice, as is the case for children, or it is painful to replace something that is already there with new learning” (Coutu, 2002: 103). Edgar Schein also indicates that there is an inherent paradox surrounding learning: “[anxiety] inhibits learning, but anxiety is also necessary if learning is going to happen at all” (Coutu, 2002: 104). Admitting ignorance may lead to anxiety, and this anxiety may be translated into fear, if the individual feels inadequate, confused and powerless (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983). On the other hand, anxiety may engender hope, helping an individual to explore the possibility of fulfilling her/his values (e.g. promotion and reward, satisfying curiosity, contributing to social development). The impact of anxiety on learning at work has also been illustrated by Vince and Martin (1993) who confirm how it both promotes and discourages learning.

Anxiety may be caused by having to say something difficult, by the pressures of unfamiliar tasks, by deadlines or through interactions across inter-group boundaries where the uncertainty created by anxiety can either be held and worked through, towards new knowledge or insight, or it can be ignored and avoided, leading towards a 'willing ignorance' (Vince, 2002). "Anxiety therefore can be seen to have a strategic dimension, to be a feeling that may equally promote or discourage learning and change" (Vince, 2002: 79). Simpson and Marshall (2010) have illustrated that guilt and hostility, together with anxiety and love, may also contribute to 'emotionalise' workplace learning processes. Guilt is similar to anxiety, but it manifests itself in more extreme emotional experiences. Guilt signals the need for deep personal change to rebuild identity integrity, and "demands intense and often difficult learning, especially where dramatic construct transitions are called for" (Simpson and Marshall, 2010: 11).

Hostility implies turning a blind eye to social signals that might suggest a need to modify one's construction of a situation. Hostility may lead to a cycle of non-learning, because people are unable to accept alternative ways of understanding one particular situation (Simpson and Marshall, 2010). Relatedly, for Scheff, human beings are intrinsically social and as such "the most crucial human motive" is the maintenance of social bonds (Scheff, 1990: 4). He argues that because human beings are motivated to cultivate social bonds, pride and shame are the most basic and powerful of all social emotions. Shame is critical in social interactions because it ties together the individual and social facets of human activity, it plays a central role in consciousness of morality, and it also works as a signal of distance between people, allowing them to regulate how far they are from others (Scheff, 1990).

Pride is felt by people when social bonds are intact, and shame arises when social bonds are threatened. Shame and pride generate moral dilemmas emerging from the conflicting discourses of caring and antagonism, and the tensions between compliance and resistance in building identity (Ingleton, 1995). The power of pride and shame in shaping learning experiences appears to emerge from the fundamental importance of the early development of trust which may generate love, fear, obedience or disobedience (Ingleton, 1995). Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1983) also assert that pride, shame, hopes, fears, exclusion and inclusion are key features in early learning experiences, and that these emotional aspects continue to be active in adult learning experiences.

The workplace is a site of continuous social interactions centred on approval and disapproval for being right and being wrong. Therefore, shame and pride may play a powerful role in workplace learning, because they are an essential part of social bonding, and the basis of self-identity and self-esteem. Scherer and Tran (2003) also argue that emotions, as ‘relevance detectors’, contribute to efficient workplace learning. Emotions “such as interest and hope can help focus attention on important issues and foster inhibition of goals that compete with a learning task at hand” (Scherer and Tran, 2003: 375). Emotions, as relevance detectors, play a major role in the process of information searching and filtering (Scherer and Tran, 2003). Interest, for instance, “provides the most important motivational underpinning of the active search for new information ... [and] focuses attention on information related to pertinent values and goals of the individual and thus can be expected to increase the efficiency of the information search and to facilitate assimilation [and learning]” (Scherer and Tran, 2003: 376).

As Scherer and Tran (2003) assert, each type of emotion has advantages and disadvantages for the learning process, and often, a mix of the various types of emotions is what seems to nurture optimal learning. In this sense, while joy in celebrating good results may reinforce a sense of satisfaction, at the same time it may discourage the development of interest and encourage stagnation (Scherer and Tran, 2003). This last point is reinforced by Fineman who observes that ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ emotions cannot be easily classified as such, for they are not only “inextricably welded and mutually informative” (Fineman, 2006: 274), but also dependent upon social contexts and social norms subject to continuous change. As Fineman clearly explains:

What is meant as fair, humane, kind, dignified, loving, [honourable], honest, compassionate, authentic or courageous can vary dynamically within and across [organisational] settings, while the “positiveness” of such constructs to a particular social order or event can be culturally and sub-culturally shaped, sometimes in contradictory terms. (Fineman, 2006: 274)

Positive experiences, workplace learning and change are linked to “negative occurrences and events, as well as to positive ones” (Fineman, 2006: 275). Adult learners, therefore, experience emotions in a range from positive and energising to negative and disturbing. In one form or another, emotional issues never seem very far from the surface in workplace learning situations. “In learning what to do, we also learn what to feel about it and about the people and [organisations] we do it for”, not in a mental response to organisational prescriptions, but as an emotional response to a bodily experience (Höpfl and Linstead, 1997: 8).

Perhaps the most common manifestation of strong emotions in workplace learning occurs around areas of conflict, in which there may be profound disagreement over values or interests. Differences among employees regarding values or interests, such as how to best proceed with an organisational project, may lead to feelings of anger or frustration, expressed perhaps as verbal attacks on other members of that project. It looks as if emotions and learning “are coupled for us from birth, ... [and as learning] arouses emotions ... emotions arouse learning” (Brown, 2000: 288). Vince (2002) also argues that emotions have an impact on organisational learning. He warns us to pay attention to the emotional dynamics of organising and to the links between emotions, power relations and organisational politics, because this will increase organisational (and workplace) learning. Emerging recently is also the idea of the emotional self as embodied, suggesting that “embodiment is integral to, and inextricable from, subjectivity” (Lupton, 1998: 32).

From this perspective, emotions express both the experience of specific body states and our interpretations of these states as mediated by socio-cultural processes. In particular, the idea of embodied emotions is part of a broader debate about embodied learning (Horn and Wilburn, 2005). Merriam et al. (2007) claim that embodied learning presents a strong emotional or feeling dimension. In addition, embodied learning delineates a theory of knowledge production that “depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history” (Varela et al., 1991: 149). The epistemological stance of embodied learning derives from its ontology, which is based on the self-evident fact that “everything said is said by someone” (Maturana and Varela, 1998: 27).

At the core of this orientation learning emerges in the making of distinctions or in the assigning of differences, as an immanent quality of mind that is embodied within learners as observers (Varela, 1979). This orientation also treats learning and emotions as thoroughly integrated at biological, psychological and phenomenological levels (Maturana and Varela, 1998; Thompson, 2007), and complemented by the relational and dynamic processes of inter-subjectivity (Froese and Di Paolo, 2009). Through the interplay between emotions and workplace learning, “we are offered a kind of language for reinterpreting ourselves and the possibility to experience and recreate our sense of selves, our subjectivities, our being-in-the-world” (Clark and Dirkx, 2008: 90). This leads us straight into the concept of the ‘embodied-relational being’, who lies at the intersection between emotions and workplace learning, and which is the focus of the next section.

4.4 Connecting Emotions and Workplace Learning: A Relational View

The literature review has shown that emotions and workplace learning are then in continuous, profound and complex interplay. Workplace learning is a process of changing through ‘negotiation of realities’ with others (Watson, 2006), a process in which reason and emotions are simultaneously involved. Emotions are also a process of changing, that is a process of learning to adapt to the emergence of people’s life-worlds. As already seen, both emotions and workplace learning appear to be relational phenomena, for their meanings unfold within relationships, and they have an embodied aspect as well as a socio-cultural one. At the very centre of this ‘relational view’ lies the ‘embodied-relational being’.

First, in *being*, we are in action, carrying with us a past as we progress through the present into a becoming (Gergen, 2009). The term *being* means also that, as individuals, we are multiple: we are not the same person in all the various situations we act in, nor we are precisely the same person today as we were ten years ago. At the same time, as individual beings we are *relational*, because we are always emerging from relationships (Gergen, 2009). Merleau-Ponty explains this relational process of becoming in the following terms:

When I speak or understand, I experience that presence of others in myself or of myself in others ... To the extent that what I say has meaning I am a different ‘other’ for myself when I am speaking; and to the extent that I understand, I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 97)

We fundamentally live in a ‘society of individuals’ (Elias, 1991), meaning that we are social beings always already embedded in a complex flow of interconnected relationally responsive transactions (Cunliffe, 2008). We are also *embodied* beings: “the body is our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 146), or better we are our bodies: “I become involved in things with my body, they co-exist with me as an incarnate subject” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 215). We exist then as embodied-relational beings in social relations, and, in this environment, we become selves who participate in a world of others that is formed by history and culture (Burkitt, 2008). Table 4.1 shows the main elements of the *relational view* proposed here.

Table 4.1 - The Relational View.

· Emergence: People's identities are always in a process of becoming; human beings are not fixed entities, they are continually adjusting to their life-world and learning (Watson, 2006).
· Relationality: A person's distinct individuality is only possible through its relating to others. It is a relational process of sense-making through 'negotiation of realities' with others (Watson, 2006).
· Contextuality: Human beings act with regard to their specific context, shaped by their ' <i>habitus</i> ' (dispositions which incline us towards certain habitual patterns of action; Bourdieu, 1977), power relations and their current identities (Watson, 2006).
· Sensemaking: People make sense of their life-world in emotional and material give-and-take exchanges with others (Watson, 2006).
· Rationality and Emotionality: Reason and emotions mutually affect each other in everything we do; to relate to others means taking into account both their reason as well as their emotions (Watson, 2006).
· Socio-Cultural Factors: Human beings are both enabled and constrained by the socio-cultural resources available to them; cultures and power relations contain discourses and narratives which may provide or not resources to be used in making sense of the life-world (Watson, 2006).
· Embodiment: Embodiment is based on the "inseparability between a particular way of being and the way the world appears to us ... [so that] <i>every act of knowing brings forth a world</i> " (Maturana and Varela, 1998: 26). We are observers who act only from within physical and socio-cultural contexts which provide a world of potential distinctions (Maturana and Varela, 1998).

I want to stress the fact that the intent here is not to argue that the 'relational view' is the only right way to look at emotions and workplace learning. On the contrary, it is argued that there are practical advantages in moving beyond, for example, systems-control ways of framing reality towards process-relational ones (Watson, 2006). A good reason for adopting a relational view is that it focuses on "processes of emergence in the patterning of relations between people, organisations and the wider social world" (Watson, 2006: 29), instead of focusing on "universalistic aspirations to maximise control over human circumstances" as the systems control perspective does (Watson, 2006: 29). Focusing on processes of emergence may be useful, for example, as a means of adapting to organisational change. In short, the intent is not to find a 'correct' definition of what emotions and workplace learning are, but to use concepts that help us critically engage with our life-world.

For Rorty, what is important for investigation is whether an account has utility for us and is useful for certain practical reasons. As he puts it:

[because] every belief we have must be formulated in some language or others and because languages are not attempts to copy what is out there, but rather tools for dealing with what is out there, there is no way to divide off ‘the contribution to our knowledge made by the object’ from ‘the contribution to our knowledge made by our subjectivity’. (Rorty, 1999: xxvi-xxvii)

The relational perspective has been developed as a response to the conventional assumption that social/organisational science must choose between ‘material versus ideal’, ‘structure versus agency’, ‘individual versus society’; rather, the choice is between substantialism and relationalism (Emirbayer, 1997: 281-282). In other words, the principal dilemma is whether to conceive of the social/organisational world as consisting primarily of substances (as static things) or of processes (as dynamic and emerging relations) (Emirbayer, 1997). Fundamental to this theoretical orientation is not only the assertion that what sociologists designate ‘structure’ is essentially relational, but also that relational thinking is an approach to overcoming stale antinomies between structure and agency through a focus on the emergence of social interactions in several kinds of social settings (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This relational view calls for a ‘transactional’ approach, “where systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to ‘elements’ or other presumptively detachable or independent ‘entities’, ‘essences’, or ‘realities’, and without isolation of presumptively detachable ‘relations’ from such detachable ‘elements’” (Dewey and Bentley, 1949/1991: 108).

The ‘transaction’, seen as a dynamic and unfolding process, becomes then the chief unit of analysis rather than the constituent components themselves. Embodied-relational beings are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded, and by the same token, societies themselves are empty abstractions apart from the plurality of associated human beings of which they are composed. As Somers and Gibson indicate “[the relational/transactional] approach embeds the actor within relationships and stories that shift over time and space and thus precludes categorical stability in action ... The classification of an actor *divorced* from analytic relationality is neither ontologically intelligible nor meaningful” (Somers and Gibson, 1994: 65-69). George Herbert Mead, one of the most significant theorists of the relational self, argues that “[we] must be others if we are to be ourselves” (Mead, 1925/1964: 292).

Mead (1934/1967) depicts the relational self as an ongoing social process with two analytically discernible phases, the ‘I’ (self-as-knower) and the ‘me’ (self-as-known). On the one hand, the ‘I’ is the subject that reacts to the present social encounter on the basis of past experiences, yet there is always an element of unpredictability concerning I’s immediate reaction. On the other hand, the ‘me’ is the social object which is to be regenerated by the ‘I’ (the agentic side of the self). The ‘me’ is our self-image when we examine ourselves through the eyes of other embodied-relational beings. In the ‘me’ we become objects to ourselves, whereas the ‘I’ is our impulsive reaction to social encounters, escaping any present moment of reflection.

The 'I' and the 'me' are not entities or substances which could be discerned, and still the human being is constituted by both of them. The 'I' and the 'me' are locked in a dialectical interrelationship. The relational self does not stand in opposition to the world, but is part and parcel of it. Da Silva (2007) observes that by positioning social encounters inside the structure of the relational self, Mead holds the pragmatist developmental view of reality that regards the emergence of the self as an intrinsic feature of the surrounding world. Hence, "selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our selves and the selves of the others, since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the selves of the others exist and enter as such into our experience also" (Mead, 1927/1982: 168). From a different standpoint, Giddens (1991) suggests that self-identity is a continuous and all-pervasive individual project. The self devises a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future and, as a coherent project, relies on the narrative of the self. For Giddens (1991), self-identity is internally referential rather than bound to other human beings, or better it involves a thick individual side and a thin relational side (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Instead, according to Bakhtin (1986), human beings exist through their relations with other human beings, and meaning lies in living conversations, that is it emerges from dialogical relations with other people. As Bakhtin puts it:

I realise myself initially through others: from them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial idea of myself ... Just as the body is formed initially in the mother's womb (body), a person's consciousness awakens wrapped in another's consciousness. (Bakhtin, 1986: 138)

His focus on dialogic and responsive interactions also stresses ‘polyphony’ (multiple voices) and creativity: “an utterance is never just an expression of something already existing outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable” (Bakhtin, 1986: 119-120). For Bakhtin (1993), in the background of unfolding events, dialogues and actions, there are three key moments: ‘I-for-myself’, ‘I-for-others’ and ‘others-for-me’. These three moments are understood as fundamental emotional-volitional moments in the ebb and flow of everyday interactions (Bakhtin, 1993). This search for self is the product of the dialogic relation (‘mutual authorship’) among these three moments (‘I-for-myself’, ‘I-for-others’, ‘others-for-me’), whereby, in actions and words, we give form to others as well as they give form to us (Bakhtin, 1993).

As Mead would put it, the world is open to being partially reconstructed. In life, then, there are always moments of passivity and activity in the constitution of the embodied-relational being, for “we are always selves-in-relation-to-others” (Cunliffe, 2008: 129). Moreover, Bakhtin (1981) points out that, even though selves have become fragmented into a myriad of different voices, most of us are still capable of developing a unified voice that we relate to our self (‘I’). “[The] ‘I’ we refer to when we speak is in part a bodily sense of being in the world, of being present in a particular place to both specific and [generalised] others, an embodied sense of self that is fully social as classed, gendered and sexed” (Burkitt, 2008: 184).

Mead uses the term ‘reconstruction’ to indicate the process of remaking who we are along with the world in which we live, that is a process of fleeting experience through the dialogue of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’, in which we human beings reorient ourselves to one another in the social world (Burkitt, 2008). The implications of adopting a *relational view* may be far-reaching, even though it does not represent the only ‘correct’ way of framing reality. The relational approach legitimates “a model of scientific research and explanation in which a continuous dialogue between social researchers – who are unavoidably part of their own subject matter – and ‘knowledgeable’ social actors in the wider community over the forms and effects of institutional (re)ordering replaces the search for law-like regularities as its *raison d’être*” (Reed, 2003: 304-305).

The relational view allows researchers to adhere to what has been called an “anti-categorical imperative” (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994: 1414), refusing the primacy of attributional categories and other substantive matters in favour of dynamic, “observable processes-in-relations” (White, 1997: 60). The central concepts of sociological/organisational analysis – for example, power, equality, freedom, agency - are also open to reformulation in terms of relational understanding (Emirbayer, 1997: 291). In this regard, agency is seen as inseparable from the unfolding dynamics of (problematic) situations. Agency is “always “agency *toward* something”, by means of which actors can enter into relationship with surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events” (Emirbayer, 1997: 294). In sum, the *relational view* underlines our responsibility for sustaining ethical dialogue, and becoming aware of how we might eschew “the suppression of alternative conceptions and possibilities” (Deetz, 1995: 223).

Emotions and workplace learning are then intimately connected, for learning is fundamentally a “labour of love, for one’s teacher, for one’s community, for oneself and for truth; yet, love itself must be cultivated and developed through learning” (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001: 444-445). The next Chapter illustrates the research approach adopted in this study as well as the issues related to the fieldwork.

4.5 Conclusion

The focus of this last chapter of the literature review has been on the connection between emotions and workplace learning. In particular, it has been sustained that emotions can be seen, to some degree, as learned experiences, and WPL can also be seen, to some degree, as an emotional experience. This chapter has striven to show that emotions and WPL are in continuous, profound and complex interplay. A central and holistic role of emotions in reason, rationality, learning and meaning making (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2006; Jarvis, 2007; Illeris, 2007) has been proposed here. It has been also asserted that the emotional aspects of learning contribute to positive educational experiences. In fact, it seems that learning both reflects and produces emotions, as well as emotions infuse processes of doing and learning with a special sense of ‘flow’ (Fineman, 2003: 561). This complex connection has been illustrated from a ‘relational’ standpoint. In this regard, it has been suggested that at the intersection between emotions and WPL emerges the ‘embodied-relational being’. First, in *being*, we are in action, carrying with us a past as we progress through the present into a becoming (Gergen, 2009). At the same time, as individual human beings we are *relational*, because we are always emerging from relationships (Gergen, 2009).

We are also *embodied* beings: “the body is our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 146). People’s identities are then always emerging from relational processes of sense-making through ‘negotiation of realities’ with others (Watson, 2006). Finally, this chapter has outlined the fact that human beings act with regard to their specific context which is shaped by their ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977), power relations and their current identities (Watson, 2006). The next chapter will present the research approach adopted in this study and the issues related to the fieldwork.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH APPROACH

Part I – Theoretical Background

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and justify the research approach ('hermeneutical pragmatism') adopted in this study. It details the philosophical foundations (epistemology, ontology, axiology) underpinning this approach, as well as the research methodology (hermeneutic phenomenology) chosen as the plan of action for selecting and making sense of data, and the research methods or specific techniques (observation and semi-structured interviews) used for accessing those data. This chapter also explains the practical and ethical issues that were addressed during the research process, as well as the criteria applied to ensure rigour and credibility. At this point, it is worth reiterating the research aims and questions, as set out in the introductory chapter. As indicated, this research explored how HRD professionals experience and make sense of the interplay between their emotions and their workplace learning within the complex context of an Italian Bank setting. The aim was to uncover the practice or professional knowledge embedded in their profession, as well as to illuminate the participants' personal learning and emotional journeys and experiences at work. As illustrated in the previous chapters, both emotions and workplace learning are complex phenomena. This complexity is related to the fact that emotions are multifaceted and dynamic phenomena which mediate body, mind and socio-cultural relations (Barbalet, 1998).

Workplace learning is also a multi-factorial and context-dependent process, embedded in daily practices, situated, emotional and mostly implicit (Billett, 2008). Therefore, investigating these phenomena required raising of participants' awareness and sense-making of their emotions and learning at work, in exploration of the sub-questions. The main question of this project was:

- How do HRD professionals experience the everyday interplay between their emotions and their workplace learning?

The exploratory sub-questions were:

- How do these professionals experience and make sense of their emotions in the workplace?
- How do they experience and make sense of their workplace learning?
- How do they experience and make sense of the interactions between their emotions and workplace learning?

5.2 Organisational Research Background

Contemporary organisational research is a field of study which presents a diverse and eclectic nature, and which is no longer monopolised or constrained by positivist epistemology and its traditional, fixed, hypothetical-deductive approaches (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009). British scholars Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan were among the first to draw attention to the multiple perspectives of organisational research. Their publication '*Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*' (1979) sparked the paradigm debate of the 1980s and 1990s.

Burrell and Morgan's work seems loosely based on the thesis of paradigm incommensurability as put forward by Thomas Kuhn in his '*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*' (1970), first published in 1962, and then republished with an explanatory postscript eight years later. Although it is a contested term, the word 'paradigm', used in many different ways by Kuhn, implies a sort of 'worldview'. Thomas Kuhn situated scientific knowledge in the context of its historical and social practices, and argued that each paradigm holds its own standards of what constitutes science and non-science. Burrell and Morgan claimed that all social research is based on four different paradigms, each with its own set of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. These assumptions sustain taken-for-granted understandings of the nature of the world and the people in it, as well as prefigured methods for uncovering what is true or worth knowing.

Nevertheless, Burrell and Morgan's claim of paradigmatic incommensurability has been criticised, for it appears to discourage "the investigation of similarities and collaborative possibilities and cross-paradigm critique" (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 23). In fact, nowadays the field of organisational research reveals three major trends: "widening boundaries, a multi-paradigmatic profile, and methodological inventiveness" (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009: 1). Consequently, the research approach is progressively located in the context of wider and more flexible intellectual tendencies, discouraging strict adherence to epistemological viewpoints and encouraging a more pragmatic 'do whatever necessary' approach to the research process (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009: 2).

“The ‘paradigm wars’ of the 1980s have thus turned to ‘paradigm soup’, and [organisational] research today reflects the paradigm diversity of the social sciences in general” (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009: 4). The dilemma for the researcher today is whether to investigate organisational practices from the perspective of one discipline, or whether to adopt a trans-disciplinary approach (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998). The former way is often seen to be the safer approach for academic purposes, but the latter is more likely to result in practical applications for organisational professionals. This dilemma is further nourished by the work of Nowotny et al. (2001) concerning the way in which scientific knowledge is produced. Nowotny et al. (2001) distinguish two forms of knowledge production which they describe as ‘Mode 1’ and ‘Mode 2’.

‘Mode 1’ is the traditional and academic-based model of knowledge production; ‘Mode 2’ is connected to the role of trans-disciplinary research, and is carried out in a context of application. It seems to me that organisational researchers should follow both ‘Mode 1’ and ‘Mode 2’ of knowledge production, because we require both theoretical and practical knowledge in our everyday life. This debate suggests that some of the traditional beliefs and practices in organisational research may well need rethinking (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Thus, there is an increasing recognition of the value of different and more flexible approaches to organisational research than the traditional positivist ones. This issue will be handled in the next section.

5.3 Philosophical Foundations

I have been influenced first by hermeneutics and more recently by pragmatism, and for this reason I think that the flexible approach informing this study is most fruitfully conceived within what Paul Fairfield (2000) has called ‘hermeneutical pragmatism’. This approach has been chosen in order to best address the research aims and questions, and because it justifies the selection of a particular methodology and methods to fulfil those aims and to answer those questions (Crotty, 1998). It is worth noting that Richard Rorty (1980) also attempts a rapprochement between hermeneutics and pragmatism, but his very interesting and quite controversial account differs from the one proposed in this section, and it cannot be described here because of space. In keeping with the transformed background illustrated in the previous section, I suggest that both hermeneutics and pragmatism, situating themselves between the bipolar positions of subject/object and relativism/universal truth, offer an alternative to the more traditional positivist approaches to organisational research. In particular, the hermeneutic tradition of Gadamer and the pragmatist tradition of Dewey provide a philosophical background for the study of professionals’ emotions and learning at work. Hermeneutical pragmatism turns to the lived world of inquiry and underlines the fact that:

... perceptual experience is not to be taken as a curtain that cuts human inquirers off from a real world of generally imperceptible entities, but the milieu within which by interaction we come to understand the world of experience itself and the furniture it contains. (Heelan and Schulkin, 1998: 270)

This new background changes the focus of scientific inquiry away from the context of justification and prediction to the context of shared knowledge, discovery, interpretation, language, action, perception and culture (Heelan and Schulkin, 1998). Thus, hermeneutical pragmatism concentrates on “how people do live without certainty ... [that is on] how people practically deal with the world and others to accomplish everyday tasks and achieve their goals, even though their knowledge is not certain” (Polkinghorne, 2000: 455-456). Despite their different languages and traditions, pragmatism and hermeneutics have each something to say that addresses these topics. The purpose of this section is not to compare and contrast these two philosophical traditions. Rather, it is to draw insights from both of them in order to illustrate how they have influenced the research process and informed this study.

Hermeneutics and pragmatism are often favourably compared in at least three ways: “in embracing the hermeneutic circle, in [recognising] the importance of aesthetic experience, and in rejecting a separation between theory and practice” (Vessey, 2006: 209). Only this latter aspect will be developed in this section, because it is the most fruitful area of convergence between hermeneutics and pragmatism. Hermeneutists and pragmatists “share the belief that theory only emerges out of practice ... [as] a motivated response to a situation where our habitual ways of acting and interpreting fall short. We turn to reflection to understand better the source of the interruption and what would be necessary to continue on” (Vessey, 2006: 211). They posit a dialectical understanding of the theory-practice relation, one that refuses to subordinate both practice to theory and theory to practice (Fairfield, 2000).

In particular, hermeneutical pragmatism acknowledges that human inquiry “is initiated by the breakdown of habits and beliefs that normally serve as guides to thinking” (Heelan and Schulkin, 1998: 287). This inquiry leading to new action to be performed “takes place outside of awareness in a kind of cognitive unconscious ... [that is it] draws on people’s background knowledge” (Polkinghorne, 2000: 457). People’s background knowledge is an ‘inarticulate’ understanding of what they do that is implicit in their acts and precedes their capacity for articulating descriptions of those acts (Taylor, 1993). This concept bears close resemblance to what Polanyi (1958/1962) called ‘tacit knowledge’ – knowledge that professionals have that is more than what they can describe at any point in time. For Heidegger, this kind of knowledge presupposes a background of everyday practices into which we are socialised but that we do not reproduce in our minds (Dreyfus, 1991).

Bourdieu (1977) employs the word ‘habitus’ to depict the way in which people dwell in their background knowledge. Dewey criticises the ‘spectator theory of knowledge’ which traditionally approached the person as a passive spectator rather than an active and interacting worldly human being. “He wanted to reconstruct traditional philosophy by changing its question from how to gain true knowledge to what is the nature of experience” (Polkinghorne, 2000: 459). Heidegger too criticises the traditional foundationalist approach and, like Dewey, proposes that philosophy should describe ‘everyday experience’. Heidegger and Dewey observe that human beings are ordinarily engaged in practical, non-cognitive enterprises, that is humans are “continually involved in doing, enjoying, suffering” (Bernstein, 1967: 63).

“It is this non-cognitive practical or background understanding that provides us with the sense we have of others, the world and ourselves” (Polkinghorne, 2000: 460). Gadamer called this practical or background understanding a person’s ‘horizon’. This form of practical inquiry is circular (Heidegger’s ‘hermeneutic circle’), and we always remain within the background circle itself, in which we move back and forth, “adjusting our new interpretations to our received [understanding] and adjusting our received understanding in light of the new interpretations” (Vessey, 2006: 209). During this process, each interpretation of parts or whole is a provisional interpretation that helps to bring to light new understanding and it is only retained to the extent it is confirmed in future interpretations (Vessey, 2006). People are always in the world by being in some specific situation or context, and culture is the primary source from which they acquire knowledge.

Hermeneutical pragmatism acknowledges that this practical or background knowledge is transmitted through one’s culture, not only through language but also through actions, emotions and gestures (Shalin, 2007). Only when actions performed without deliberation are unsuccessful in achieving their intended aims do people reflect on the reasons why their actions did not succeed in those particular situations (Polkinghorne, 2000). “When a breakdown occurs in the functioning of the background, people move from their ordinary, practical mode of engagement with the world to a mode of deliberation or reflection” (Polkinghorne, 2000: 465). For Schön, this deliberation or reflection caused by breakdowns in our background understanding may lead to reflection-in-action:

[reflection occurs] when there is some puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As [he/she] tries to make sense of it, [he/she] also reflects on the understandings which have been implicit in [his/her] action, understandings which [he/she] surfaces, [criticises], restructures, and embodies in further action. (Schön, 1983: 50)

A hermeneutical pragmatist view of reflection-in-action, such as the one proposed here, stresses “its embedded (social), engaged (practice), and embodied (material) aspects” (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009: 1342). Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’ is “caught up in the surrounding world of actual life-related practices ... [and within] such social practices, reflection-in-action is triggered by ‘backtalk’ - surprise - from the ‘materials’ of the practice” (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009: 1342), leading the individual to devise a response or reaction to the breakdown he/she faces. Dewey and Gadamer hold that people could improve their practical know-how and background knowledge (Polkinghorne, 2000). Improvements are more likely to happen when background knowledge is ineffective in accomplishing a task or a result. Dewey sees experience as an active and unfolding process, and people as active agents who have the ability to change their background understanding. One’s background knowledge is dynamic. It is shaped in interactions with the life-world and it evolves during its processes of coping with the environment (Polkinghorne, 2000). These processes entail inquiry which can be viewed as a progression through four stages: (a) experience of an uncertain situation; (b) recognition of the problem; (c) determination of a solution; (d) experimenting with the determined solution (Polkinghorne, 2000).

If the applied solution does not solve the problem, the process of inquiry continues until a solution is found, or a positive ‘judgment’ is made about the ‘warranted assertability’ of the proposed solution (Dewey, 1938/1991). Both Dewey and Gadamer stress the fact that the processes of inquiry and understanding entail the insights of ‘practical reason’ or ‘*phronesis*’ to envisage possibilities in situations of unpredictability. This possibility of gaining access to the understanding and wisdom of other backgrounds, through the meeting and dialogue among different backgrounds or traditions (‘the fusion of horizons’), yields a larger horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 1994). Gadamer (1994) emphasises the fact that this ‘openness’ is essential to all aspects of human inquiry: openness to the problematic of the initial background understanding; openness to a reappraisal of that initial background understanding; openness to framing questions that reveal different aspect of the topic; openness to how the reframing of questions is to be fulfilled.

This dialectical process “does not terminate in a final, correct action: rather, it leads to progressively more adequate responses without a final closure” (Polkinghorne, 2000: 475). The dialectical process between theory and practice informs critical reflection in two main ways. First, it renders background knowledge explicit, by articulating ‘what happens to us’ when we participate in a practice (Gadamer, 1994). Secondly, the dialectical process helps “to gain critical perspective on the manner in which a practice is conducted”, making it possible to reorient the fashion in which that practice is conducted (Fairfield, 2000: 17). In short, the dialectical process of human inquiry proposed here is a form of human culture, rooted in historicity, and contingent upon inter-subjective human projects and symbolising practices.

Along this line of reasoning, the claims of epistemology ('the relationship of knower to known') are brought together with ontology ('the nature of existence') and axiology ('the role of values in inquiry') under one roof, rooted in the process of inquiry as outlined above. "It is in the action context of a problematic situation that we are moved to search to identify problems, hypothesize solutions, and experimentally test those solutions. Thus even scientific activity is a practical act and as such circumscribed under the rubric of practical reason, or intelligent agency" (Hogan, 2009: 386). The research approach adopted here, 'hermeneutical pragmatism', rejects traditional-foundationalist epistemology and, specifically, the 'spectator theory of knowledge'. In place of such a traditional account, this thesis suggests the new version of epistemology crafted by Dewey (1938/1991) – one that has as a key element the notion of 'warranted assertability'. As Dewey puts it, warranted assertion:

is preferred to the terms *belief* and *knowledge* [because] it is free from the ambiguity of these latter terms, and it involves reference to inquiry as that which warrants assertion. When knowledge is taken as a general abstract term related to inquiry in the abstract, it means "warranted assertability". The use of a term that designates potentiality rather than an actuality involves recognition that all special conclusions of special inquiries are parts of an enterprise that is continually renewed, or is a going concern. (Dewey, 1938/1991: 9)

Warranted assertions replace justification in the traditional 'correspondence theory of truth' by merging truth and the process of inquiry together "in such a way that correspondence to an external world is no longer the point" (Boyles, 2006: 61). Hence the focal point of epistemology is 'knowing' not 'knowledge'.

For Dewey, it is important to outline the dynamic process of inquiry ('knowing') instead of its fixed end ('knowledge'), because inquiry is performed by living people in a lived world that is not static, and in which problems are faced and solved in such a way that "the action entailed in the solving of problems *is* inquiry, such that 'warrant' is a property of assertions made about the problem when it is solved" (Boyles, 2006: 61). In the process of 'knowing' we grasp the world 'pathically', and this understanding is primarily relational, situational, corporeal, temporal, actional (Van Manen, 2007: 20). Phenomenologically, all knowing is realised through embodied acting and relational processes of enactment. Such action of knowing lays focus on our capacity to activate our beliefs and values in action, cognitively, emotionally, practically and relationally. Relationality is "the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them" (Van Manen, 1997: 104). The relational nature of (epistemological) 'knowing' is summarised in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 - Relational Nature of Knowing (adapted from Cunliffe, 2008: 133)

-
- Knowing is entwined within implicitly knowledgeable activities: informal, unbounded, and often intuitive ways of making sense. 'Practical wisdom' (Ricoeur, 1992).
 - Knowing is both embedded in social situations, in interaction, and embodied in our experience of our world: it relates to how we live our lives and make meaning with others (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).
 - Knowing is sustained and created in multiple interactions and social practices.
 - Knowing as intersubjectively and ongoingly created shared (or shareable) sense, which people see at that moment as providing acceptable orientations and ways of moving on.
-

In this regard, it is useful to remember that:

... [the] most general presupposition of sociological thought can be expressed in the slogan: *in the beginning there is the relation* ... In other words, the relational is the 'start' of social reality, both in theory and in practice. (Donati, 2010: 17)

This premise lets me introduce the relational orientation to ontology underpinning my research approach. Such an ontological orientation takes as primary the nexus of relations in organisations, and aims at exploring the ‘space between’ people and phenomena in organisational life-worlds (Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000: 551). The term ‘space between’ is taken from Martin Buber (1970) to denote the space in which resides the interdependence between the self and the other which are not separable, “as they co-evolve in a process of continuous interplay through which they give meaning to one another and the relationship in between” (Özbilgin, 2006: 246). A relational ontology takes the basic units of social and organisational analysis to be neither individual entities nor social structures but relational processes of interaction between and among identities (Somers, 1998).

As Merleau-Ponty (1948/1968) puts it we always are to our world, that is we all belong to life as “flesh of the world”, interconnected with everyone and everything. “Understanding the life-world as ‘flesh’ means understanding an ontological connectedness and mutuality; it is the idea that everything that is, is so because of everything else that exists” (Dahlberg et al., 2008: 39). We have access to the lived world through our bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), as embodied-relational beings who interact with other human beings in a world of tradition, history and culture. In short, the relational orientation to ontology presented here suggests that the individual cannot be separated from his/her world context, because the world is in the individual as much as the individual is in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The research approach adopted here also acknowledges the role of values in human inquiry (‘axiology’).

It recognises that human inquiry is value-laden, being influenced by inquirer values as expressed in the choice of the research problem, in the framing, bounding and focusing of that problem, as well as by the values that inhere in the context of inquiry itself (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Nowadays there is a growing recognition that it is not feasible to hold the values that a researcher has completely in check (Bryman, 2004). It seems more feasible to acknowledge that research cannot be value free, and “to ensure that there is no untrammelled incursion of values in the research process and to be self-reflective and so exhibit *reflexivity* about the part played by such factors” (Bryman, 2004: 22). Both pragmatism and hermeneutics assert that all research is value-laden, that is dependent upon the temporal and historical situation in which research itself is conducted; this is the position taken in this study.

5.4 Research Methodology

The research methodology chosen depends on the research questions and the philosophical approach from which the questions are to be explored (Creswell, 2007). A study devised to understand the nature of the interplay between emotions and learning at work, from the experiences and interpretation of HRD professionals in daily workplace practice, lends itself to hermeneutic phenomenological research. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions and interpretation of the lived and living experience of selected phenomena in the life-world of participants. Using hermeneutic phenomenology meant that I could investigate participants’ interpretations and include my own.

It should be also noted that while pragmatism proposes neither a specific methodology for the conduct of social or organisational research nor any specific research method (Biesta and Burbules, 2003), at the same time it shows a strong desire to succeed and make things work (Fuchs, 1993). Therefore, within the purpose of the study, 'hermeneutic phenomenology' has been adopted as the research methodology for this project, because it offers a concrete and valid solution in itself and because it seems to be coherent with my overall research approach, aims and questions. Large scale studies and questionnaires, generating mainly quantitative data, have been not considered to be sufficient to appraise the multi-faceted aspects of emotions (Fineman, 2003) and workplace learning (Boud, 1998).

Hermeneutic phenomenology shares many common points with pragmatism. They both focus on the meanings of experience in everyday life, embrace the hermeneutic circle and reject a separation between theory and practice. For Bourgeois and Rosenthal (1983), pragmatism incorporates many central ideas of hermeneutics' return to the 'lived experience', and for both traditions there is a sort of continuity between the 'lived experience' and the 'scientific experience' (Bourgeois, 1996). In this regard, reality is deemed to be only experienced as a function of the human-environment transaction (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and pragmatism also see the life-world as 'perceived world' and oppose the idea that meaning is something given to us, turning instead attention to our self-understanding and the ways in which the experienced life-world opens to us in our inevitably finite human horizon.

In particular, Heidegger and Dewey call for a deconstruction of the traditional foundationalist philosophy and propose that philosophy takes up a different task: describing everyday experience from the perspective of our background knowledge (Polkinghorne, 2000). Heidegger identifies this task as a phenomenological-hermeneutic inquiry. Although Dewey does not use this term for his method of inquiry into the background knowledge, Parodi (1989) suggests that it is a phenomenological-hermeneutic kind of exploration. Hermeneutic phenomenology was therefore considered to be appropriate for this study so that the meanings with which HRD professionals understand the interplay between emotions and workplace learning can be interpreted, in light of the changes to their working environment.

In order to place hermeneutic phenomenological description and interpretation within the context of the pragmatist idea of verification, the findings of this study were discussed with participants (see section 5.12 and section 5.13 of this Chapter). Hermeneutic phenomenology directed attention to the meaning that participants attached to their living and lived experience of the phenomena under study, which is essential for an understanding of human conduct (Van Manen, 1997); all of this in accordance with the research aims and the relational view proposed here. Human conduct is also emergent and continually constructed during its execution through reinterpretation and redefinition by social actors (Blumer, 1969). Consequently, the presentation of data took the main form of a narrative text which conveyed the researcher's interpretation of the data and reported things as they appeared to be as encountered in the field and documented in the field text (Cohen et al., 2000).

Moreover, it has been observed that there is a need to investigate how emotions and workplace learning are experienced and interpreted by participants themselves (Garrick, 1998; Fineman, 2003), and hermeneutic phenomenology should help me to appraise those experiences and interpretations. In particular, I have chosen to use the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology as informed by the work of Max Van Manen (1997) and by the work of Karin Dahlberg, Helena Dahlberg and Maria Nyström (2008). This methodology “tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project” (Van Manen, 1997: 29). And yet, it recognises that “there is tradition, a body of knowledge and insights, a history of lives of thinkers and authors, which, taken as an example, constitutes both a source and a methodological ground for present human science research practices” (Van Manen, 1997: 30).

Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology pays close attention to both the philosophies from which it is derived (Van Manen, 1997). This research orientation has its roots in the phenomenological tradition. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) first used *phenomenology* as a philosophical perspective in the 1890s to study how people experience their life-world, and developed his speculations on the assumption that “we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings” (Patton, 2002: 105). The first implication of this assumption is that it is important to know “what people experience and how they interpret the world” (Patton, 2002: 106).

The second implication is that the researcher using this methodology is directed towards participant observation and in-depth interviewing, because it is only possible to understand another's experience by going through the same experience (Patton, 2002). Husserl introduced the notion of 'life-world' (in German 'Lebenswelt') or lived experience, that is the everyday life in which we live and experience pre-reflectively or directly. "All experience is experience of something, [and] places the Being in a relationship with the world" (Ihde, 1990: 22-23). The "relationality of human-world relationships is claimed by phenomenologists to be an ontological feature of all experience" (Ihde, 1990: 25), and at the root of all human knowing.

The task of phenomenology is "to return to the things themselves", that is to the taken-for-granted experiences and re-examine them in order to recover a fresh and deeper understanding of the nature of our everyday life, one unprejudiced by acculturation (Van Manen, 1997). Key concepts of Husserlian phenomenology are intentionality, essences and phenomenological reduction or 'bracketing'. Husserl's idea was that our consciousness is directed toward objects and this directedness is termed 'intentionality'. The building of our knowledge of reality should therefore originate with conscious awareness. The second idea is to direct attention 'to the things themselves' and to the 'essences' that constitute consciousness and perception of our life-world; essences are therefore the ultimate structures of human consciousness. The idea of 'bracketing' involves the elimination of pre-conceived notions in order for the 'essence' of the phenomena themselves to come to light (Crotty, 1998).

As it has been suggested:

[the life-world] appears meaningfully to consciousness in its qualitative, flowing given-ness; not an objective world ‘out there’, but a humanly relational world full of meanings. The primary nature of this relational reality means that there is no objective world in itself, nor an inner, subjective world in itself, there is only a world-to-consciousness. (Todres et al., 2007: 55)

Phenomenological theory is helpful here in that it attempts to indicate the existential constituents of the life-world (Van Manen, 1997; Dahlberg et al., 2008), such as *embodiment* (‘lived body’), *inter-subjectivity* (‘lived human relation’), *temporality* (‘lived time’) and *spatiality* (‘lived space’). These ‘existentials’ imply one another and are closely intertwined. *Embodiment* refers to the phenomenological fact that humans are always bodily in the life-world (Van Manen, 1997), because “we bodily live in meaningful ways in relation to the world and others” (Todres et al., 2007: 57). The body is undeniable and cannot be avoided, as long as it is the living body which offers our attachment to the world, and which carries out all our living actions (Dahlberg et al., 2008). In the conceptual framework it has been sustained that the ‘biological’ self is socially and culturally influenced by others. In the context of this study embodiment is especially important for HRD professionals because the changes they face every day in their bodies affect their life-worlds while feeling, learning, moving, thinking, working and socialising. *Inter-subjectivity* or ‘relationality’ is the lived relation maintained with other people in the interpersonal shared space. When the embodied-relational being looks inside the self he/she sees others and when the embodied-relational being looks at others and knows about others he/she sees the self with greater understanding.

In the context of this study, relationality refers to attempts to make sense of the life-world. *Temporality* is subjective time unlike objective clock time. It is the perceived time that speeds up during enjoyable experiences and slows down during boring ones. The temporal dimensions of past, present and future constitute the horizons of a person's temporal landscape. According to Polkinghorne (1988), Heidegger distinguishes three thematic elements in human consciousness related to time. The first element is the closest to everyday time and is connected to interactions with objects. Heidegger refers to this as 'within-time-ness'. It is centred on the personal need to be organised and to achieve things by a certain time. The second element is what Heidegger labels 'historicity', and relates time to an awareness of the self as an embodied-relational being with a past existing through duration. The third and most relevant element is 'temporality', in which the embodied-relational being is faced with personal finitude.

In the context of this study, temporality is particularly poignant for HRD professionals because they often work under pressure, respecting strict deadlines imposed by other people, and all of this may influence their emotions and their workplace learning. *Spatiality* refers to 'felt space', that is "the world or landscape in which humans move and find themselves at home" (Van Manen, 1997: 102). A place may be geographically close but the felt space may look further away, remote, untouchable and unattainable. Humans seek to be understood, to be appreciated and to feel comfortable in the places they inhabit. While the home reserves a very special space experience which has something to do with the fundamental sense of being-in-the-world, the workplace reserves a very different experience.

This latter may be a demanding space for HRD professionals in terms of emotions and workplace learning. In harmony with the rest of this study and with attempts to uncover meaning and openness, the existentials are grounded in the socio-cultural context of HRD professionals working in an Italian Bank. The philosophical orientation of the project and the research methodology adopted here, such as ‘hermeneutical pragmatism’ and ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’, are believed to be valuable in revealing the meaning of the lived experience of those HRD professionals, with regard to both emotions and learning at work.

Hermeneutics

Like phenomenology, hermeneutics is concerned with the life-world perspective and with understanding. The term *hermeneutics* is derived from the Greek ‘*hermeneuin*’, meaning ‘to interpret’ (Moran, 2000: 271). Hermeneutics originated in the interpretation of biblical texts (‘exegesis’) and, through the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), hermeneutics turns philosophical, focusing its attention not only on the interpretation of texts, but more generally on the conditions of possibility for human communication as such. Hermeneutics is then based on the notion of inter-subjectivity or ‘relationality’: the assumption that human beings share a common world and that this world can be interpreted. In particular, according to Palmer (1969), hermeneutics has three basic meanings. The first is to communicate something aloud with words or to proclaim something verbally. The second meaning of hermeneutics is to explain and to illustrate something, in order to acknowledge a person’s particular point of view. The third meaning indicates that hermeneutics means translating, bringing texts in a foreign or unknown language into a language we can understand.

The common denominator of these three basic meanings of hermeneutics is “to lead to understanding” (Palmer, 1969: 14). In the mid-1920s Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) triggered the ontological turn in hermeneutics which was carried on by his student Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2001). For Heidegger (1927/1962), hermeneutics is not about providing a methodological basis for understanding linguistic communication. In his view, hermeneutics is ontology, it is about the phenomenological explication of ‘*Dasein*’, such as the human experience of *being-in-the-world* within a historical and finite ‘*lived time*’ (‘temporality’). With this ontological turn, hermeneutics now deals with the meaning of human existence itself (Crotty, 1998): it is turned into an existential endeavour.

For Heidegger and Gadamer, Husserl’s attempt to characterise intentionality fully by phenomenological reduction or ‘bracketing’ is to be critically evaluated. Heidegger and Gadamer suggest that, before any explicit awareness on its part, the human being finds itself immersed, or better ‘*thrown*’, in a world which is ‘always already there’, ‘*the life-world*’. This pre-givenness of the life-world means that, as a result of our very human existence, that is of our ‘being-in-the-world’, we possess what Heidegger and Gadamer call a ‘pre-ontological understanding’ of the world itself. All our explicit human understanding builds on this always presupposed – and never fully schematisable – ‘ground’. Like Heidegger, therefore, Gadamer regards hermeneutical understanding to be a mode of being rather than a way of knowing (Moran, 2000). That position has been adopted here. The hermeneutical viewpoint assumes that the researcher, by virtue of a shared and common language and culture, is able to see or understand the phenomenon under study.

Moreover, it is assumed that the researcher has some level of pre-understanding, also called 'prejudice', gained through his/her familiarity with the phenomenon itself, which allows him/her to interpret meanings in context and relation to the situation to be studied. Gadamer does not consider prejudices as negative; they are a result of culture, gender, race and class, providing access to the world and to understanding (Koch, 1995). Thus both the researcher and participants should be aware of their pre-understanding of the phenomena to be studied, and should bring their prejudices to the fore, disclose them, in order to question those prejudices and dialectically interpret those phenomena. This emphasis on understanding has led to three key concepts for hermeneutical interpretation: the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons, and the act of dialogue.

The hermeneutic circle represents understanding as a movement between parts and whole, that is a "process of moving dialectically between a background of shared meaning and a more finite, focused experience within it" (Thompson, 1990: 243). For example, the meaning of a single word is understood in connection with the whole sentence, and correspondingly the meaning of the whole sentence is dependent upon the meaning of the single words in it (Crotty, 1998). The hermeneutic circle is not an endless repetitive spiral; each time the person goes round the circle, understanding of the unity of the whole increases and matures (Taylor, 1993). Gadamer is also credited with developing the concept of understanding as a '*fusion of horizons*' (Crotty, 1998). For Gadamer (1994), the process of fusing past horizons (*tradition*) with the present (*experience*) is part and parcel of the hermeneutical process, and equates to the concept of understanding.

The catalyst that drives this process is questioning: “understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else’s meaning; questioning opens up possibilities of meaning” (Gadamer, 1994: 368). The researcher’s task is to display how fusion between the participants’ perspectives and those of the researcher has occurred (Koch, 1995). The key to success throughout this process is the willingness to remain open to meaning and to be cognisant of one’s own prejudices and horizons (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Moreover, a person’s horizon and background knowledge are temporal and changing. The horizon of the present is constantly in the process of *becoming* because people are testing their prejudices time after time, through encountering the past and in making sense of the tradition from which they come (Moran, 2002). Gadamer also describes understanding as an ‘*act of dialogue*’ between people (or text), and directs people themselves to engage in conversation in a particular way:

[conversation] is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens [himself/herself] to the other, truly accepts [his/her] point of view as valid and transposes [himself/herself] into the other to such an extent that [he/she] understands not the particular individual but what [he/she] says ... thus we do not relate the other’s opinions to [him/her] but to our own opinions and views. (Gadamer, 1994: 387)

Understanding emerges through the fusion of horizons that develops in the dialogical process between the researcher and phenomena to be studied. Therefore, the best the researcher can hope for is to try to recognise and make explicit his/her understandings, biases, beliefs, values and theories that are brought to the research (Van Manen, 1997), and to achieve “freedom from *undisclosed* prejudices” (Moran, 2002: 2).

This is also the attitude maintained in this project. I have tried and will try to recognise my prejudices through writing, analysis and critical reflection on the conceptual framework set out in chapters two to four. With every draft, research proposal and ethical review paperwork my assumptions and values about the research phenomena and the process itself (e.g. about the answers to the questions or about the literature review) have become more visible by checking those of others. As a result of the ontological turn implemented by Heidegger and Gadamer, hermeneutics is converted into an ‘existential philosophy’ in which interpretation and understanding are the fundamental categories of human existence. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that contemporary hermeneutics no longer provides a unified theory of interpretation, showing instead multiple views and contrasting theories concerning the rules of interpretation (Ricouer, 1981). Nowadays hermeneutics has turned to human life and existence as such. For Ramberg and Gjesdal (2005), it is in this new form, as questioning the deepest conditions for symbolic interaction and culture in general, that hermeneutics has provided the critical horizon for many lively debates among contemporary philosophers, both within the Anglo-American context (Rorty, McDowell, Davidson) and within the Continental tradition (Ricouer, Apel, Derrida, Habermas).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology and hermeneutics, as just outlined above, are the building blocks of the research methodology adopted here and called ‘*hermeneutic phenomenology*’ (Van Manen, 1997), which is believed to have originated with Heidegger and the belief that human existence is interpretative and socially embedded (Willis, 2004).

Heidegger's link with ontology has influenced my orientation to hermeneutic phenomenology for this project, allowing me to focus on the Being-relation with the world. Hermeneutic phenomenology addresses the nature of experience from an ontological and relational perspective, and it is in harmony with my research project. This research orientation also enables the beliefs and values held by the researcher on the nature of the experience to be regularly scrutinised and questioned. When unanticipated data appear they force the researcher to stand back and ask 'what does this mean?'. The process of being confronted with non-confirmation of prior assumptions allows unpredictable data to be closely examined and arranged. Underlying hermeneutic phenomenology research is "a search for the fullness of living" (Van Manen, 1997: 12).

Van Manen goes as far as to state that "[hermeneutic] phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the [fulfilment] of our human nature: to become more fully who we are" (Van Manen, 1997: 12). While it is true that the method of hermeneutic phenomenology is that there is no method, yet there is tradition, a body of knowledge from thinkers and authors, which forms both a source and a methodological example for present human science research enterprises (Van Manen, 1997). In this regard, Van Manen explains that, reduced to its elemental methodological framework, hermeneutic phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interconnection among *six research activities*:

1. turning to a phenomenon of interest;
2. investigating experience as we live it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and re-writing;

5. maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (Van Manen, 1997: 30-31).

These six methodological themes “are meant not to prescribe a mechanistic set of procedures, but to animate inventiveness and stimulate insight” (Van Manen, 1997: 30). These six steps provide a workable and useful guideline for my research project together with the concepts of *openness* and *meaning* taken from the reflective life-world research design (Dahlberg et al., 2008), which also intertwine with the already seen concepts of embodiment and inter-subjectivity. *Openness* is the attitude of the person who seeks knowledge and nurtures an open position to the phenomena under study, and it is the sign of a true willingness to listen, see and make sense of those phenomena (Dahlberg et al., 2008). It involves respect, humility, flexibility and “the capacity to be surprised and sensitive to the unpredicted and unexpected” (Dahlberg et al., 2008: 98). Openness is a wish to understand something in a new way (Gadamer, 1994). The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is also the clarification of *meaning*, that is the understanding of the phenomenon as it is given to us, bearing in mind that from this perspective meaning is never finally complete. Meaning is always contextual and expanding (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and the possibility for understanding is infinite (Gadamer, 1994). “Meaning emerges in relation to the life-world, and when the life-world changes, meaning changes as well” (Dahlberg et al., 2008: 115).

Recently, hermeneutic phenomenology has been employed in research concerning the experience of emotions in the workplace (e.g., Küpers, 2002; Dougherty and Drumheller, 2006), and in research concerning the experience of workplace learning (e.g., Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2010; Webster-Wright, 2010). To sum up, hermeneutic phenomenology has to do with the infiniteness of language, and it is because of language that we, as researchers, can “put into words, explore and describe existential phenomena such as suffering, wellness, learning, alienation, anxiety, loneliness, and their meanings” (Dahlberg et al., 2008: 116). Using hermeneutic phenomenology means that I can investigate the participants’ interpretations and include my own. Phenomenology is concerned with lived experience and it is thus ideal for exploring personal emotional and learning journeys at work. Hermeneutics adds the interpretative component to clarify meanings and assumptions in the text that participants themselves may have, in some occasions, difficulty in articulating, for example, ‘tacit knowing’. Emotions and workplace learning are interconnected and hermeneutic phenomenology offers a way of understanding such human experiences captured through language and in context (Van Manen, 1997).

Part II - Fieldwork

5.5 Research Site and Participants

As already stated in Chapter One, in 2011 I conducted a field study of emotions and workplace learning in the HRD Office of a large Italian Bank. This company, which I call ABC Bank (a pseudonym), is engaged in both the retail and corporate banking sectors. Because of limited resources, the selection of research site and people was confined to a particular context accessible to the researcher.

Moreover, the selection of a particular context, such as the HRD Office of ABC Bank, provided commonality for the comparison of individual responses. That community of people was chosen from a group that could typically be found in most financial organisations in this case a Human Resource Development Office. Selecting a single research site provided the opportunity to develop an in-depth and rich description of emotions and workplace learning in a particular context, as required by hermeneutic phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1997). The HRD Office of a Bank makes a suitable case for this project, because the HRD field involves recurrent human interactions and deals with complex problems, such as issues of, for example, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and power as well as human development.

At the time of the research there were 33 people working in the HRD Office of ABC Bank: 23 full time employees, 9 middle managers and one manager (the Head of the Office). ABC Bank employs more than 10,000 workers worldwide, and its registered office is located in northern Italy (in the city of Milan). I was granted approval for access and to conduct my fieldwork research by the Head of the HRD Office. This manager, interested in the topics under investigation, informed her staff about the project and my contact details, so that interested HRD professionals could contact me directly if they wished to be included in the project itself. Thus, gaining access to the research site was not a problem. I chose to use ‘purposeful sampling’ which is a non-probabilistic sampling method, in order to select information-rich cases for detailed study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002). This method of sampling is consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological research (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

Random sampling was deemed to be inappropriate because it is not a reliable method for gaining detailed information about particular phenomena or for establishing relationships (Cohen et al., 2000). Typically, the sample size is small in hermeneutic phenomenological research because it is usual to receive an abundance of rich data (Patton, 2002). Indeed, “in-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable” (Patton, 2002: 244). It has been suggested that, in hermeneutic phenomenological studies, the researcher needs samples of 10 to 15 people (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) or of 6 to 10 people (Morse, 2000) in order to produce the richness of data required for this type of research.

In hermeneutic phenomenology, there is no talk about saturation because meanings are infinite, always expanding and, consequently, “no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description” (Van Manen, 1997: 31). The phenomena under study should direct the way data are accessed, but in general it is important to include participants of different ages and genders, as well as people with different professional experiences, and from different geographical areas and cultures, in order to capture significant variations in the data. Nineteen human resource professionals were enrolled for this study, ten were women and nine were men. Four of them were not from Italy but from other countries (one from Austria, one from France, one from Japan, and one from Nigeria). I did not ask for age, but I would estimate that the ages of participants ranged from late 20’s to mid-50’s. My goal was to select HRD professionals who ranged in:

1. gender;
2. age;

3. years of work experience (with a minimum of more than two years);
4. geographical area of origin;
5. position in the organisational hierarchy.

Table 5.2 presents a summary of the participants' relevant background information.

Table 5.2 – Summary of participants' details

Pseudonym – Gender		Age Range (Years)	Working Experience (Years)	Place of Origin	Organisational Status
1. Alisa	F	25-35	5	Italy	Employee
2. Andrea	M	25-35	3	Italy	Employee
3. Barbara	F	25-30	2.5	Italy	Employee
4. Gina	F	45-50	19	Nigeria	Employee
5. Giulia	F	40-45	14	Italy	Middle-Manager
6. Karine	F	30-35	6	France	Employee
7. Marco	M	35-45	14	Japan	Middle-Manager
8. Morena	F	45-50	18	Italy	Manager
9. Pamela	F	25-30	4	Italy	Employee
10. Paolo	M	50-55	22	Italy	Employee
11. Pietro	M	30-35	3	Italy	Employee
12. Rachele	F	45-50	20	Italy	Middle-Manager
13. Renato	M	45-50	16	Italy	Employee
14. Riccardo	M	35-40	10	Italy	Middle-Manager
15. Roberto	M	55-60	26	Italy	Employee
16. Romualdo	M	30-35	7	Italy	Employee
17. Rolf	M	40-45	12	Austria	Middle-Manager
18. Rosalina	F	35-40	5	Italy	Employee
19. Rosetta	F	40-50	10	Italy	Employee

That community of people was chosen from a group that could typically be found in most financial organisations, in this case a human resource development Office. Professionals working in the banking sector were selected as this sector may be classified as consisting of knowledge intensive firms and ranks high in employing knowledge workers. An additional stimulus for choosing the HRD Office of an Italian Bank was my personal experience as a lawyer in the banking sector, and a keen interest in the HRD field.

Focusing on a single case study (Stake, 1995) provided the opportunity to investigate one HRD Office in depth, that is professionals in their specific social context in which emotions and workplace learning are assumed to be part and parcel of a community of practice where activities are co-constructed by social, cultural and situational factors. Participants were at varied stages in their working career and life ambitions, with variegated life and professional experiences, motivations and goals. Six of nineteen participants had completed or were currently enrolled in formal postgraduate degrees, such as Masters' coursework or Doctoral studies. Lifelong learning was acknowledged by all the participants as necessary for personal development and success in their professional careers and for job satisfaction. All participants also recognised the pervasive influence of their emotions on their social participation in the workplace activities and, more generally, on their working lives as human beings.

5.6 Ethical Issues

Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the Ethics Research Officer of the University of Leicester School of Management. Although there are different perspectives on the matter, management research must ultimately follow a set of ethical principles. Hermeneutical pragmatist research is concerned with producing valid and trustworthy knowledge in an ethical manner (Fairfield, 2000). With this in mind, this study was guided by ethical principles that contributed to the trustworthiness of data (Silverman, 2005). The nature of this project required an emphasis on a respectful relationship between the researcher and participants (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) that involved mutual trust and support.

Participants were selected on a voluntary basis and almost all of them were unknown to the researcher. Hence, this study adopted key ethical issues of respect for participants, researcher-participant relationship, and the professional standards related to data selection, analysis and dissemination of findings (Merriam, 2009). Prior to data selection, participants received an information letter (Appendix A) explaining their involvement, and were each advised, both verbally and in writing, that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time with their confidentiality respected. Further, each of the participants involved in the project was given a pseudonym to protect his/her privacy and identity. Throughout the study, the researcher was aware of the fact that the informed consent is a continuing and flexible process (Bell and Bryman, 2007) not limited to the acquisition of initial consent (Appendix B).

In this regard, all participants were given the opportunity to ask questions to the researcher, and additional permission was sought from participants at each round of the interviewing process. Harm, wrongdoing and risk were prevented or minimised during fieldwork, and the dignity of all people taking part in this study was observed in order to avoid discomfort or anxiety. The researcher also established a relationship with participants built on trust, respect, disclosure and reciprocity. Time was given to participants to express significant emotions so as to have them feeling safe, recognising the importance of this to their well-being. In this study, observation of participants during fieldwork raised the greatest ethical concerns, because of the difficulty associated with ensuring that informed consent was gained from all people observed (intentionally or incidentally).

While all participants were provided with an information letter detailing the aims of the research process, I also ensured that people incidentally observed were given the opportunity to ask me questions about the study, and verbal consent to observe was gained from these people too. At all times these ‘incidental participants’ (co-workers and visitors) were assured that all information, unavoidably acquired, pertaining to themselves would not be made public. To sum up, the ethical issues that surface in flexible research are not put to rest by scrupulous adherence to the standard procedures for informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, but they should be dealt with on an individual and daily basis (Punch, 1994). In fact, as Rubin and Rubin (1995: 96) suggest “[you] cannot achieve ethical research by following a set of pre-established procedures that will always be correct ... [you] must build ethical routines into your work ... [and] keep thinking and judging what are your ethical obligations [throughout your research]”. This is also the spirit that guided my ethical practice during this research project.

5.7 The Role of the Researcher

This study took place in the HRD Office of an Italian Bank that was not the one where I worked at the time. To this end, I contacted one gatekeeper, that is the Head of the HRD Office of that Bank who guaranteed access during my fieldwork. My position, therefore, was that of an ‘outsider’ because I was not a member of the organisation under study, and there were no existing power relations between the researcher or supervisors and the participants that could be perceived as coercion. Nonetheless, I want to problematise the insider/outsider dichotomy, arguing that it is a simplistic one. I think that the role of the researcher stands somewhere in the middle and it is a negotiated role, a sort of ‘space between’ (Buber, 1970).

We are all insiders and outsiders to varying extents in every research setting (Tinker and Armstrong, 2008). The issue is not the insider or outsider status but the ability to be open, genuine, trustworthy, and committed to carefully and adequately representing the experience of participants. Moreover, the so-called 'outsider' status can be used to positive effect (Tinker and Armstrong, 2008). For example, Fay (1996) argues that not being a member of the group under study can facilitate the knowing of that group. First, he posits that someone from the outside might more adequately give an idea of the experience, not being immersed in that experience. Second, the outsider might be able to see through the complexity of the experience in a way the individual enmeshed in it cannot be able to see. Third, the external observer might acknowledge the wider perspective, its connections and multiple patterns, better than the one internal to the experience itself.

Finally, those external to the experience might more clearly see what is occurring and can overrule self-deception. A prudent researcher must be aware of these issues and be conscious that there are both negative and positive aspects of the insider/outsider status. I concur with Hodgkinson (2005) who indicates that the role of the researcher is better conceptualised on a continuum, rather than as an either/or dichotomy. From a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective it is also important to consider that the researcher, as an embodied-relational human being, is always in a 'hermeneutic circle of understanding' in which something is understood because of pre-existing beliefs and experiences (Crotty, 1998). The researcher brought to this study a pre-understanding of emotions, of workplace learning, of human resource development, and of being a middle manager in a bank, which gives a shared background with the participants.

The researcher sought to overcome any misunderstandings by clarifying these pre-understandings personally and with participants both prior and during the study. The reaction of participants and other people to the presence of the researcher may have also influenced the research (Patton, 2002). For example, the presence of the researcher may have caused increased anxiety and stress in participants who felt their working activities were observed and evaluated. These effects may have been overcome by the fact that the researcher was also a middle manager in a bank with a long and deep interest in understanding the emotional and learning processes at work. These personal beliefs were expressed and recognised at the outset of the study in the expectation that such full and complete disclosure would assist the researcher establish credibility.

The establishment of credibility as a bank colleague also helped to increase the participants' perception of the researcher as competent to be investigating the phenomena under study. In addition, participants were informed of their right to have access to the transcripts of their guided interviews and informal conversations. This access formed an important part of the hermeneutic phenomenological technique of data analysis utilised in the study and, therefore, access to these data was inherent in this process. Such free access to their accounts may also have contributed to broaden the perspective of the individual participant inside the case, so that they may have begun to see the broader view from the researcher's outside view of the research site. During the fieldwork, the process of data selection and analysis has almost certainly resulted in a change of understanding of emotions and learning at work by both the researcher and participants.

It has been suggested by Patton (2002) that such personal insights, which develop through involvement and experience with the fieldwork, form a significant and rich source of data themselves. Thus, in this study, shifts in attitudes were fully recorded and accepted as part and parcel of the research process of making sense of data.

5.8 Research Methods

Given the hermeneutical-pragmatist orientation of this study, the research methods used here were flexible, intended to capture the rich array of inter-subjective experiences of participants during their everyday working activities. Research methods are simply techniques for collecting data (Bryman, 2004). It should be noted, however, that “the idea that we ‘collect’ data is a bit misleading. Data are not ‘out there’ waiting collection ... For a start, they have to be noticed by the researcher, and treated as data for the purposes of his or her research. ‘Collecting’ data always involves selecting data, and the techniques of data collection ... will affect what finally constitutes ‘data’ for the purposes of research” (Dey, 1993: 15). The procedures and techniques used for selecting and making sense of data, as well as the specific information considered to be ‘data’, need to be congruent with the overall research approach (Crotty, 1998), and need to provide valuable information about the participants’ experiences of the phenomena under exploration. Data selected using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology consist of “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” gained through interviews; “detailed descriptions of people’s activities, [behaviours], actions” obtained through observations; and “excerpts, quotations, or entire passages” extracted from several types of documents (Patton, 2002: 4).

As previously mentioned this research primarily used two methods of data selection: observation and semi-structured interviews. In this study, the purpose of making observations was to describe the work setting and context, such as the everyday experiences in which both emotions and learning are assumed to take place, and to describe how the HRD professionals involved saw their actions and those of others (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Indeed, as Spradley explains, the essential core of making observations is

the concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to investigate ... people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organise their behaviour, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. (Spradley, 1979: 5)

On the one hand, everyday experiences and the ways of dealing with them become more visible through observation. On the other hand, the meanings attached to those experiences become more clear through interviews. The purpose of interviews was, thus, to explore participants' experiences by obtaining information about the meanings attributed to emotions and learning at work (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Prior to the first site visit, initial contact with the HRD Head Office of ABC Bank took the form of an introductory letter and a research project recruitment attachment. After several telephone conversations with the Head Office herself, a follow-up letter was sent to those HRD professionals (a total of 19) who agreed to participate in this research. Initial contact information exchanges included logistical considerations, roles and responsibilities and a tentative timeline for site visits. During my fieldwork, I was conscious of the demands of this study on the participants, considering their existing workloads.

Therefore, the time period for accessing data was spread out between March 2011 and October 2011, in order to decrease the intensity of the demands of the study itself. Participants' availability determined the time period for selection of data from each HRD professional involved in this investigation. Interviews and observation were combined in order to enable the researcher to better make sense of the one through the other (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Silverman, 2006) and, consequently, in order to better understand the human experiences of emotions and workplace learning.

5.9 Observation

The first research method used in this investigation was 'close observation' (Van Manen, 1997: 68). By using close observation the researcher tries to enter the life-world of the participants whose experiences are relevant study material for his/her research project (Van Manen, 1997). In this regards, it can be argued that close observation is not only a research method but also "a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researchers" (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994: 249). Close observation entails "an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations" (Van Manen, 1997: 69). In hermeneutic phenomenological research, participation and observation are regarded as "two abstract poles of a more pragmatic continuum" (Cohen et al., 2000: 64). It seems impossible to imagine observation of the life-world without the possibility of social interaction or some form of participation being inherent in that observation (Cohen et al., 2000).

Close observation allows the investigator to be close to the action as it is actually happening (Grbich, 2004), and it is a very flexible form of research that can adapt to and follow up events as they transpire in the research setting (Grbich, 2004), in a way quite similar to the shadowing technique. In this study, for example, observations of working activities were occasionally followed up directly with informal interviews as events were occurring, allowing data to be selected before participants had time to forget or reconstruct the events. Moreover, observations enabled me to gain valuable contextual information when entering the research site, and provided a solid foundation for the formation and implementation of the interview questions. Field observations can be said to have started from the very first contact with the research site and the participants. A convenient date was arranged with each HRD professional for me to observe them performing their normal work tasks for the majority of one day.

Observation sessions varied in duration, occasionally lasting an entire day, but more often between two and four hours. I experienced few field research problems, and as time passed I was able: to observe ongoing behaviour as it occurred and to support such observation with field notes; to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with the participants over time; and to be regarded as part of the scenery. During the fieldwork I attempted to minimise the inconvenience associated with my presence, and I also “spent a great deal of time lingering around individual people, observing them work outside of meetings, at their work stations ... or in small interactions with one another” (Casey, 1995: 201). Sometimes I accompanied HRD professionals on their lunch breaks or had a cup of coffee with them.

Observations were used to gain an understanding of emotions and learning at work in their context, and to gain an understanding of the interactions between participants and other people in the work setting. After every session of fieldwork, I wrote up extensive field notes documenting my observations. Data selection activities during the observation stage included:

- audio recording of participants' interactions with co-workers and other people;
- observing and recording relational strategies used by participants for performing emotions, such as facial expression and 'body language', as well as used for working and learning, such as rituals at work, actions and social practices;
- observing and recording the physical space (e.g. furniture, technological artefacts, noise levels, presence of other people) and the interactions of participants with their physical space;
- listening to and recording comments made and language used by participants in social communication; and
- reflecting and recording any development in my thinking about the phenomena under study, and about my experience of being a 'close observer'.

Field notes served to support such observations and understandings, and improved the quality of information obtained in such interactions. When possible, notes were also taken from informal conversational interviews. Comparisons were then able to be made between what participants were actually observed to do in relation to emotions and workplace learning and verbal descriptions of their perceptions. Wherever possible, these field notes and jottings were developed into full descriptions as soon after the observation session as possible, in order to increase the usefulness of both the period of close observation and field notes as data sources.

While this proved to be difficult to achieve on some occasions, usually due to the busyness of the work setting under investigation, these field notes allowed a beginning sensemaking of the situation just observed that could be further explored during interview sessions (Merriam, 2009). This is consistent with the hermeneutical pragmatist approach of this research, which suggests that meaning is always subject to negotiation that may lead to new interpretations of meaning, perhaps resulting in change (Fairfield, 2000). As Schwandt notes, postmodern scholars have questioned “the authority of the eyewitness participant observer to represent the lives of others” (Schwandt, 1997: 111), but we should recognise, nevertheless, that we can say little about organisational life “unless we get close to human action and social interactions” (Watson, 2011: 205) as we do in close observation. Moreover, from the epistemological viewpoint of hermeneutical pragmatism, observations appear, on the whole, as a valid source of knowledge production because the ‘guiding idea’ is that ‘truth’ is not to do with getting a correct or absolute “representation of reality in cognition” but is an expression of “an increase of the power to act in relation to an environment” (Joas, 1993: 21).

5.10 Interviews

The second research method used in this study was interviewing. The interview sessions started after the observation stage; this sequence allowed me to better make sense of contextual information, and made it easier for me to implement the interview guide on the basis of the background information already gained during the observation stage.

Interviews were a necessary source of case study data (Merriam, 2009) because they encouraged participants to recall, reflect on and freely express their subjective experiences and interpretations in a coherent and meaningful discussion. Interviews also helped to clarify and modify my observations; in some cases they confirmed my own assessment of a situation, and in others they offered a different interpretation that forced me to reconsider my analysis. Interviews were therefore chosen as the primary data selection method because they are “the main road to multiple realities” (Stake, 1995: 64). Interviews usually commenced with a general statement about the purpose of the research, then a general question regarding the overall emotional and learning experience in the workplace. I prepared a specific interview guide before each interview for each participant, with questions that probed particular issues that emerged from observation.

Some questions were standard across participants (Appendix C), and some open-ended questions were used to encourage reflection and detailed description of experiences. The themes taken up in interviews were: professionals details (e.g. the educational background, tasks being currently worked on, competencies needed, challenging situations at work, the organisational context and culture); history of personal emotional and learning experiences; and specific emotional and workplace learning experiences. Participants were asked questions such as: How would you describe your educational background? What about your current job? How would you describe your emotional experiences at work? What about your workplace learning experiences? Could you tell me something about a challenging/problematic situation at work? How did you face that situation? What did you learn? What role did emotions play in that particular circumstance?

How do you make sense of the interplay between emotions and learning at work?

A basic premise of the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology is that “a driving force of human consciousness is to make sense of experience. In general, people try to reach this understanding by interpreting their lives as they occur by treating them as narratives that are unfolding” (Cohen et al., 2000: 59). As Kvale and Brinkmann remark, the “research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 2). This method for soliciting narrative data is called ‘semi-structured interviews’; in this way, information is exchanged between participant and interviewer in “both directions, the format is relatively unstructured, and the emphasis of the interviewer is on listening to whatever the [participant] says as opposed to guiding and controlling the conversation” (Cohen et al., 2000: 61). At the heart of semi-structured interviewing is “an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006: 9). In this regard, Heron underlines the fact that the first and archetypal pattern of human inquiry is two persons talking and asking questions of each other.

He suggests that:

[the] use of language, itself, ... contains within it the paradigm of cooperative inquiry; and since language is the primary tool whose use enables human construing and intending to occur, it is difficult to see how there can be any more fundamental mode of inquiry for human beings into the human condition. (Heron, 1981: 26)

A series of three interviews were scheduled at a date, time and place convenient to each participant. The semi-structured interviews used in this study included several common questions as indicated in the 'interview guide' (Appendix C). Probes and follow-up questions, when needed, helped to keep the participants on track and to link the three interview sessions. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience. With fourteen of the participants, I met them during work hours at their workplace (conference room, office or cafeteria). With the remaining five participants I met them during evenings or weekends in the library or in a coffee shop. All interviews lasted approximately up to 90 minutes and were recorded, with the participant's consent, using a digital note-taker with a cassette recorder as backup.

According to the guidelines stipulated by Seidman (2006), the first interview was a focused life history, connected to the research matters, to provide the context of each participant's experience: that is, gradually uncovering and reflecting on the life experiences leading up to where the interviewee was at present. The second interview provided details of the participant's current experiences as they relate to the topics under investigation. This allowed the participants to reconstruct recent workplace learning and emotional incidents, and share a story of a typical task that best depicted the type of work they do. The third round of interviews provided an opportunity for participants to express the meaning of their experiences of emotions and learning at work. The question of 'meaning' addressed "the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (Seidman, 2006: 18).

Seidman argues that the opportunity for participants to review their current experiences in depth and in the context of the circumstances that have brought them to their present situation are critical steps in the individual sensemaking process (Seidman, 2006). When doing a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the interviewer, even when following a particular protocol, should adopt a reflexive stance, that is he or she should reflect “critically on the self as researcher, the human instrument” (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 183). It should also be noted that “knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore the job of the interview is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced” (Mason, 2002: 62). Numerous factors can aid the research interview process.

The nature of the relationship that is developed is possibly the most important. The interaction in the face-to-face encounter of the interview “takes place in the context of a relationship” (Polkinghorne, 1983: 267) that is central to what is ultimately co-created. In this particular study, I tried to set an open and relaxed relationship with participants from the first interview session onwards. During that initial session, participants were asked to share recollections of emotional and learning stories from their childhood. Interviewees generally liked talking about their childhood emotions and learning experiences. They seemed to enjoy recreating stories from their past, and they also shared stories about how they became HRD professionals. In short, the first interview session facilitated the establishment of a good relationship between the researcher and participants. The second interview was the most challenging one for most participants.

The bulk of that interview involved interviewees sharing stories of recent emotional and workplace learning experiences. Having established rapport during the first meeting helped this second session to be successful. Some participants were comfortable exchanging the first stories that came to mind, while others were much more concerned about the accuracy of their answers. During the second interview most participants asked me if they were providing me with the right information. Generally, they were and I regularly gave my interviewees positive, appropriate feedback and thanked them for their participation (Seidman, 2006). As suggested by Seidman, I tried to listen more and talk less because ‘listening’ is the most important skill in ‘interviewing’ (Seidman, 2006: 78). Engaging in active listening helped me to monitor my own reactions and to be as open as possible to the participants’ perception of their experiences.

Being prepared, providing ample time and being fully present during the interview sessions provided extra support. In addition to paying attention to each of these features, I was careful to be mindful of the participants’ specific schedule and pace. It was also important for me as the interviewer to follow up on what interviewees said, asking for clarification, seeking concrete details and requesting stories (Seidman, 2006). In this process, my aim was to have participants guide the overall direction of the interviews and to keep them conversational. Clearly, I also needed to keep adequate focus to select the information for my research. In order to do this, at the beginning of each interview I explained what the focus was for the day, and then was explicit about when we were shifting to talk about another topic.

At the beginning of the third interview, I pointed out that this last interview session provided an opportunity for the participants to correct me if I misinterpreted or misrepresented any information they had shared with me. The third interview was then an occasion to play back some of the material of the previous interviews to the person who provided it for reaction, in order to stimulate the participant to recall some additional information not mentioned before. Furthermore, there were opportunities to raise questions during this last interview, to clarify facts, processes and interpretations, as well as to seek an understanding of the meaning that the experiences under investigation had to participants themselves. During the whole interviewing process it was important to remain open and not to draw premature conclusions, but to continually ask questions and search for alternative interpretations in light of my own background knowledge (Gadamer, 1994; Van Manen, 1997).

The themes for the interviews extended from theoretical studies related to the topics being investigated to the practical issues faced by HRD professionals in their day-to-day working life. This turning to the participants' everyday experiences encouraged them to feel free to say more about their emotions and learning at work. Repeated interviews also stimulated increasing depth of engagement of participants with the phenomena and understanding by the researcher. This was deemed significant for this study because of the tacit and embedded nature of the phenomena being explored. Moreover, prolonged interactions with participants and repeated interviews ensured rigour in data selection (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Whilst I acknowledge the criticism of using interviews as a source of accurate or even ‘authentic’ representation of the world as understood by participants (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002), I support Hammersley’s argument that interviews can still be a useful means of gaining information about what people think and experience (Hammersley, 2003). It is also acknowledged that the interview process itself is a socially and culturally constructed practice (Hammersley, 2003; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), and that the questions asked by the researcher determined, in part, how HRD professionals responded. The active process of knowing through interviewing is “intersubjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 18). Interview knowledge is developed in conversational relations; “it is contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 18).

A hermeneutical pragmatist approach “involves a transition from philosophical legitimation to the practical effects of knowledge” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 304). Hermeneutical pragmatist questions are specific and practical, such as “Is this interview-constructed knowledge useful?”; “Useful for whom and for what?”; “Are the results sound?”. The debate about the application of the knowledge produced through the interviewing process raises socio-political and ethical issues which should be reflected upon, but that do not undermine the contention that interviewing “is a powerful way of producing knowledge of the human situation” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 311). To sum up, I support Alvesson’s argument for a ‘reflexive pragmatist’ view on the interview process (Alvesson, 2011). Faith in ‘data’ should be questioned and the complexity and uncertainty of the research practice acknowledged.

It should also be recognised that any meaning gained from interviews is contestable (Alvesson, 2011). This means working with alternative lines of understanding and vocabularies, that is exploring more than one set of meanings (Alvesson, 2011). As such “[*reflexivity*] means a bridging of the gap between epistemological concerns and method. *Pragmatism* means a balancing of endless reflexivity and radical scepticism with a sense of direction and a commitment to accomplishing a result” (Alvesson, 2011: 7). The aim of the reflexive approach, as well as of the interview knowledge produced in this research, is to offer a good interpretation of the phenomena under study “through the systematic drawing upon of alternative points of departure” (Alvesson, 2011: 7), and by using interviews for the generation of ideas and analysis. The reflexive pragmatist attitude towards the interview process is an appropriate and valid way for justifying the knowledge produced within that research practice, being consistent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the hermeneutical pragmatist research approach proposed here. In this regard, it was deemed useful to keep a ‘reflexive journal’.

5.11 Reflexive Journal

It has been pointed out that ‘reflexivity’, such as “the reflexive act of questioning the basis of our thinking, surfacing the taken-for-granted rules underlying [organisational] decisions, and examining critically our own practices and ways of relating with others” (Cunliffe and Jun, 2005: 227), is an essential aspect of the hermeneutic phenomenological research process adopted here (Finlay and Gough, 2003; Lavery, 2003; Dahlberg et al., 2008).

For this reason, I maintained a ‘reflexive journal’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) throughout the entire research project, effectively a fieldwork notebook that provided an additional source of data in the form of a detailed account of my own observations, emerging ideas and reflections. The journal included both my field notes and my reflections, as I found it easier to keep a single file to which I could constantly refer. The journal entries described my observations of the settings, participants, interactions and dynamics; my reflections on the underlying issues and subtexts; and my reflections on my role as researcher. It was in these reflections that I noted my own personal feelings and reactions to events as they unfolded (Neuman, 2000), and also my observations of participants’ emotions and social interactions.

It was in the reflexive journal that I tried to connect previous field notes, my reading of the literature, discussions with my research supervisors and my own emerging ideas. It was here that much of my early theorising and ongoing data interpretation took place, which in turn influenced my decisions of ‘where to go next’ in the research process. For example, these journal entries show evidence of my decisions about what questions I thought would be pertinent to ask to participants, in order to elicit information on what they believed to be critical issues at that time, and in order to improve the subsequent stage of my field observation. Bogdan and Biklen refer to these steps as “analysis in the field” and suggest that they are performed concurrently with data selection, as they guide and shape the study as it progresses (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992: 154).

I found my reflexive journal writing to be critical to the process of uncovering some of my own preconceived beliefs, judgements and values, as it afforded me the chance to express my thoughts and feelings, and to relate what I was finding in the literature and discussing with my supervisors to events as they unfolded. I also found that this process of reflexive journal writing helped me to raise consciousness of my own tacit understanding of my workplace learning, relationships and emotions at work. I made particular journal entries of each observation and interview session, describing the setting, the discussion, the outcomes, and the general experience of that observation or interview. These entries helped me to find emerging issues and themes, as well as to develop the interpretation of data.

Moreover, any informal conversation with participants and significant others was recorded in my reflexive journal. These records illustrate, for example, the interaction, with whom and where the interaction and conversation took place, the topic of conversation, and my reflections as to how that interaction influenced my ongoing interpretation of and decisions about progress in the research project. In all, the reflexive journal provided a place where I was able to distance myself from the setting under study in order to ponder how my thoughts and values were affecting and being affected by the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It has been noted that in hermeneutic phenomenology our own thoughts and values are something that cannot be eliminated, because 'self' is part and parcel of every human endeavour and we, as researchers, participate in making data (Koch, 1995). For example, the researcher identified his personal preconceptions, unstated assumptions, and other prejudices that may have biased the inquiry.

Husserl's views of bracketing our prejudices, in order to return to the pure essence of the phenomenon under study, are distinct from Gadamer's belief that prejudices are essential for understanding because they form our horizon and, thus, they cannot be eliminated. Hermeneutic phenomenology maintains this view that researcher's prejudices are important for understanding and cannot be removed with bracketing and, therefore, the best the researcher can do is to recognise and make explicit his/her interpretation, values and prejudices that are utilised in the research (Van Manen, 1997) and to achieve "freedom from *undisclosed* prejudices" (Moran, 2002: 2).

This view is retained in this thesis. This process of writing about assumptions and beliefs about the phenomena under study is an ongoing reflective stance which adds rigour to the project, helping the researcher to become more alert to implied prejudices (Cohen et al., 2000). Ultimately, the process of critical reflection is aided by keeping a journal and that process is an internal work that "the researcher undertakes to make inquiry rigorous" (Cohen et al., 2000: 89). In this regard, the use of a reflexive journal can help to enhance the rigour and credibility of the research endeavour itself (Koch, 1995). The use of a reflexive journal is also one way in which a 'hermeneutic circle' can be engaged, moving back and forth between the parts and the whole of the written text (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Finally, I recognise that reflexive journal writing enabled me to clarify my research aims and approach where I explored and made decisions about epistemological, ontological and methodological issues; that is about what I could know, my relationship to what could be known and how I might come to know it (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

5.12 Data Analysis

The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to produce a thick description that accurately captures and communicates the meaning of lived experience for the participants being studied (Cohen et al., 2000). In this study, a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was used to provide a descriptive and interpretive account of participants' everyday experiences of emotions and learning at work. In this regard, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and these transcriptions, along with field notes collected during the observation sessions and insights concentrated in the reflexive journal, were used for data analysis. "Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 2009: 175-176).

It has been suggested that "[there] is no particular moment when data analysis begins" (Stake, 1995: 71), because data selection and analysis are a simultaneous process in hermeneutic phenomenological research (Cohen et al., 2000). The process of data analysis, which is meant to answer research questions (Merriam, 2009), can be depicted as moving between two metaphors – that of a field text, shaped by the activities of data selection, "and that of a narrative text, which is meant to convey the researcher's present understanding and interpretation of the data to all other readers and which stands alone as the findings of a hermeneutic phenomenological study" (Cohen et al., 2000: 71). The tentative understanding attached to those findings should always be in written form.

Not only do these writings provide a detailed record of the data analysis process, but also, as Van Manen (1997) asserts, the act of writing itself constitutes the research process in hermeneutic phenomenology. The dialectic progression referred to as the 'hermeneutic circle' (Gadamer, 1994) guides the hermeneutic phenomenological practice of data analysis, and can be described "as a movement between the whole - the parts - the whole" (Dahlberg et al., 2008: 236) such that understanding results in a circular and iterative process. Data generated through hermeneutic phenomenological studies need to be organised and managed. In this study, interview data, field notes and personal reflection were converted into digital form, in order to allow those data to be copied and stored both in computer files and in hard-copy devices.

The actual transcription of interviews was conducted by myself and lasted over a period of eight weeks. I also translated parts of the text from Italian to English when necessary. For hermeneutic phenomenology, the analysis of data is a process of co-construction between the researcher and participants, in which understanding occurs through a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1994). In this context, the researcher and participants work together to bring life to the experiences being studied, through the use of imagination, the 'hermeneutic circle', and attention to language and writing (Laverty, 2003). Hein and Austin (2001) point out that hermeneutic phenomenology has no step-by-step method. However, it is still necessary to devise certain steps to guide the data analysis process. Therefore, data analysis was developed from hermeneutic phenomenological principles and from suggestions in the related literature about organised and useful ways of interpreting research data.

There were six steps in the analysis of data as illustrated in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3 – Steps of data analysis devised for this study

1. Immersing Oneself in the Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading through the data several times • Initial interpretation of texts to facilitate coding • Identifying essential characteristics from each encounter with participants
2. Data Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deciding what is relevant and what is not
3. Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking data down into component parts which are given names
4. Thematic Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovering themes embodied in the evolving meanings of experience in order to organise writing
5. Making Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting themes and concepts • Linking the literature to themes and concepts identified above • Reorganising interpretations into stories
6. Writing and Re-Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing mediates reflection and action (Van Manen, 1997) • Writing turns into a process of re-writing (re-thinking, re-reflecting, re-cognising) (Van Manen, 1997)

Step One – Immersing Oneself in the Data

All data belonging to each participant were put together, including interview transcripts, field notes and insights from the reflexive journal. These data were read and re-read in order to become familiar with the text set. I also listened carefully to the audio-recording of the interviews along with the relevant notes I took during my fieldwork. This process is often referred to as “immersing oneself in the data” (Cohen et al., 2000: 76), and involves engaging with the meaning of the texts, where the aim is to get a ‘sense’ or preliminary interpretation, which then facilitate data reduction and coding (Cohen et al., 2000).

Step Two – Data Reduction

Based on some preliminary understanding of the data, this step entails some decision on the part of the researcher related to what is relevant and what is not (Cohen et al., 2000).

This stage is similar to editing (Cohen et al, 2000). Data that were similar and discussions of the same topic were grouped together.

Step Three – Coding

Data were then broken down into component parts which were given names (Bryman, 2004). For two main reasons, a manual coding method was chosen as an alternative to the use of analytic software packages. First, the number of data selected was deemed to be sufficiently small as to allow the use of a manual method for the coding activity without having to deal with the complexities that might arise from software packages. Second, by coding manually I was able to achieve a greater degree of familiarity with the data selected. Moreover, whilst software packages can be useful in facilitating data reduction, indexing and retrieval, they might also contribute to the loss of the contextual gist. The meaning of each HRD professional's significant statement was spelt out to form a picture of each participant's data as a whole. Care was taken to ensure that the meanings obtained were as close as possible to the original data. In this way, my understanding of the phenomena under investigation became richer and deeper. Thus, at the end of this phase I had grouped all relevant data under appropriate component parts or clusters, in order to answer each of the research questions.

Step Four – Thematic Analysis

In the literature, 'themes' refer to elements which occur frequently in the text (Van Manen, 1997). Themes may be understood as aspects of the "structure of lived experience" (Van Manen, 1997: 79).

This stage of data analysis requires that the researcher labels themes and extracts passages that have similar themes to be able to look at them together and alongside passages that have the same label but are separated from the rest of the text. By sorting out initial thematic findings, more emergent essential themes were disclosed and elaborated. The initial pilot analysis was integrated into the whole study later. I constantly moved backwards and forwards between the literature, the research text and earlier analysis. This process allowed me to discover meanings that participants could not articulate, in the light of the complexity and tacit nature of the phenomena being studied. As has been stated, in determining “*the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is*” (Van Manen, 1997: 107).

Step Five – Making Connections

Moving from concrete descriptions of observable data to somewhat more abstract levels involves using concepts to describe the phenomena under study and making connections among them (Dey, 2003; Merriam 2009). In this phase I explored the literature for links to the themes elaborated from the entire data set. I also searched for links between the main themes to strengthen further theoretical development. “In summary, data analysis is a process of making sense out of data” (Merriam, 2009: 193).

Step Six – Writing and Re-Writing

The final stage of data analysis required writing and re-writing the research text, in order to try “to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the life-world” (Van Manen, 1997: 131). The development from elaboration and comparison of themes to a coherent picture of the whole took place through this reflexive process of writing and re-writing (Cohen et al., 2000). This development implied the contextualisation of all the relevant data selected and analysed during the research activities. Finally, as questions arose during data analysis, I returned analysed data to each participant to check the validity of findings. It was this reinterpretation of emerging themes and concepts, important to the process of data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology, which gradually enabled me to clarify relationships within the data. Through this process of data analysis, an in-depth interpretation of the lived experience of HRD professionals participating in this research was sought.

5.13 Dealing with the Issue of Validity

All research is concerned with producing valid knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009). Ethical conduct is the key issue of all research and has been discussed earlier. The issue of ensuring validity in hermeneutic phenomenology is not as clear-cut or easily defined as it may seem in traditional, positivist research, in which the focus is on the measuring instrument. In hermeneutic phenomenological studies “the researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2002: 14) and, therefore, “the quality of the craftsmanship of the researcher” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 261) throughout the investigation is crucial in ensuring validity.

Maxwell states that validity is “a goal rather than a product: it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: it has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions” (Maxwell, 2005: 105). In embracing this stance, I want to underline the fact that *understanding* (‘*verstehen*’) is a more fundamental concept for hermeneutic phenomenological research than validity. I see the issue of validity that I propose here as derivative from and consistent with the kinds of understanding gained from hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Understanding “entails capturing the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour through investigating how they experience, sustain, articulate and share with others these socially constituted everyday realities” (Johnson et al., 2006: 132). The validity of these descriptions and interpretations is determined therefore by the rigour and credibility of the explanation given of the situation (Patton, 2002). In support of this view, I have chosen the criteria of *rigour* and *credibility* as appropriate for this research in order to deal with the problem of ensuring validity.

Rigour

Rigour in hermeneutic phenomenology means that all decisions made during the research process are thoughtful, and that alternatives and ramifications are considered (Cohen et al., 2000). It also means transparency in documenting the research process itself and consistency in operating within the philosophical foundations of the research approach (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

Several strategies have been identified in the literature as enhancing rigour, including congruence between the adopted research approach and chosen research methods, prolonged engagement in the field, multiple methods of data selection and an auditable trail (Creswell and Miller, 2000). The application of these strategies in this study is considered. Congruence pertains to the notion of consistency between the aims of the research, the methodology and methods employed to select and analyse data, and the philosophical foundations of the research approach (Crotty, 1998). Throughout this study, I have endeavoured to show congruence by delineating the philosophical foundations of the chosen research approach and its historical development and relevance to this study, and by coordinating it with the methods of data selection and analysis adopted here.

Prolonged engagement in the field and repeated interactions ensure that data selection is rigorous (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Data were selected over a period of eight months, with several visits to the research site and participants. Over this period I built trust with participants who felt free to disclose information and discuss their views on emotions and learning at work, increasing the rigour and credibility of the research findings. Multiple methods of data selection provide multiple constructions of phenomena, thereby helping to enhance rigour and richness of data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In this study, data were selected using repeated interviews, observation, field notes and a reflexive journal. The use of multiple methods of data selection helped, for example, to check what participants told me during the interview sessions against what I observed during the visits to the research site.

The use of mixed methods for data selection was deemed to be congruent with the research approach and methodology (Crotty, 1998) and provided rich data about the participants' experience of emotions and learning at work. A driving force of human consciousness is to make sense of experience, and people try to reach this understanding by interpreting their life-world as it emerges by treating it as a narrative that is unfolding (Cohen et al., 2000). In hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, researchers talk to people and watch them in everyday living. Their narratives or their bodily activities convey meaning that in the research text can be understood linguistically (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Moreover, hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is phenomenon oriented. This means that the more complex phenomena seem to be, like for example, emotions and learning at work, the more a "combination of methods can be worthwhile" (Dahlberg et al., 2008: 176).

Interviews elicit those narratives from participants aiming at understanding the meaning of human experience. Observation adds to those narratives in order to construct a richer field text, providing important context and insights for the narrative data selected through interviews (Cohen et al., 2000). Because of Gadamer's (1994) assumption that human understanding depends on the particular historic context, it was deemed essential to visit the research site several times and to have three interview sessions with participants. Their understanding of the phenomena under investigation and the understanding of the researcher changed over the period of time spent for the fieldwork. Gadamer (1994) refers to this idea of change, or development of understanding, as the hermeneutic circle.

On the one hand, the researcher was able, through his preunderstanding, to understand the participants in a certain way. On the other hand, the understanding of the participants influenced the understanding of the researcher. The researcher then presented a conversational and co-constructed version of the phenomena under investigation which he is responsible for interpreting in the final instance. Thus, a new understanding of emotions and workplace learning appeared through the fusion of the horizons of participants and the researcher, as interpreted by the researcher in the thesis. In the hermeneutic circle one does not remain in the same place but constantly new knowledge emerges through conversation with people and the life-world. Several interpretations then occur: the participants' interpretation of their context; the researcher's interpretation of participants' ones and subsequent fusion of horizons; the reader's interpretation of the researcher's thesis.

The hermeneutic phenomenological viewpoint underlying this research methodology supports then the adoption of multiple methods of data selection as the appropriate way of bringing researcher and participants directly into the hermeneutic circle of interpretation (Van Manen, 1997; Dahlberg et al., 2008). An audit trail describes in detail how data were selected, how key themes were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the research inquiry (Merriam, 2009). The audit trail enables readers to evaluate the validity and trustworthiness of the study, and it is also a tool that aids the researcher to develop a reflexive account of the research process (Koch, 1996; Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The audit trail for this study included the field notes and the reflexive journal documenting all methodological, contextual, ethical and personal considerations and decisions.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the research findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) such as the extent to which any research claim is shown to be based on evidence (Silverman, 2005). Credibility is enhanced when strategies are utilised to check on the inquiry process and to allow the direct assessment of research findings and interpretations by the human sources from which they have come (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Member checking, thick description and transferability of findings were the strategies used in this study to enhance credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checking as the most significant technique for establishing credibility in a study. Member checking “is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (Maxwell, 2005: 111).

Member checking consists of taking data and interpretations back to some participants in the study “so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (Creswell and Miller, 2000: 127). In this regard, after the third interview, all participants were asked to read my preliminary analysis to ensure my interpretation of their experience was accurate. Some parts of that preliminary analysis were then re-written to accommodate any changes made by participants. This course of action added to the rigour and credibility of the research process. Thick description is used as a strategy to enable credibility, and it refers to a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting, the participants, and the findings of a study (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

In relation to this last issue, I have tried to provide a detailed description of my research findings in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes and personal reflections. All of the above mentioned points concurred to produce rigour and credibility, and their combination allowed the co-construction of findings with my participants. Finally, thick description is also useful for ensuring transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Transferability implies that “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 298). The application of new ideas to new contexts may allow new meanings to be released (Dahlberg et al., 2008). This concept of application is part and parcel of the endless process of *understanding* (Gadamer, 1994).

5.14 Conclusion

This study was conducted using a research approach infomed by both hermeneutic and pragmatism. Multiple methods of data selection were used, including observation and repeated semi-structured interviews. A reflexive journal was also used to include my field notes and reflections. Data analysis was mainly informed by the work of Van Manen (1997) and hermeneutical framework of hermeneutic circle, dialogue questions and answers, and fusion of horizons. The findings of the analysis of the phenomena drawn from the participants’ lived experiences are illustrated in the following three chapters.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS I: Experiencing Emotions at Work

6.1 Introduction

This is the first of three chapters presenting the findings related to this research study. I do not attempt to generalise to other groups or population; readers are invited to consider the application of these findings to their specific contexts. Emotions and workplace learning (hereinafter also called ‘learning at work’ or ‘work-related learning’) are considered here as embedded phenomena, which are subsumed within the main research phenomenon: the interplay between emotions and learning at work. These embedded phenomena are reflected in the following research sub-questions: How do HRD professionals experience and make sense of their emotions in the workplace? How do they experience and make sense of their workplace learning?

In order to answer these questions, I present interpretations of the experiences of emotions and learning at work derived from my fieldwork. Findings related to the third sub-question (‘How do they experience and make sense of the interactions between their emotions and workplace learning?’) are discussed in Chapter Eight along with the main question: How do HRD professionals experience the everyday interplay between their emotions and their workplace learning? The principal research phenomenon, the interplay between emotions and learning at work, is not commonly thought about or reflected upon in practice; it is embedded in the fabric of practice and social interactions themselves.

Simply asking participants about their experiences of emotions and workplace learning would have yielded limited results. Therefore, exploring the sub-questions was necessary for two key reasons: 1) to raise the participants' awareness of connected phenomena which could lead to accessing the principal research phenomenon so that it could be studied appropriately and deeply; 2) to understand how they experienced and made sense of emotions and learning at work. The term 'embedded' underlines the interconnections between these phenomena. Once the participants identified emotions and learning at work as part of their daily practices they became more aware of them between each interview and observation session, and they were able to attend to them and therefore discuss and reflect about them in the follow-up sessions.

The research findings presented here were selected following extensive reading and re-reading of participants' data and participants' interpretations (first order constructs) that were assembled with the researcher's interpretations (second order constructs). These second order constructs were arranged into meaningful themes and further elaborated to illustrate each theme. The hermeneutic circle was used to guide analysis by moving between the parts (data) and the whole emerging understanding of the phenomena under study, each giving deeper meaning to the other. Through a comparative analysis of data a number of major themes emerged. Table 6.1 is offered as a 'road map' to guide the reader through the themes and chapters. It is acknowledged here that each individual extract has been selected as somehow representative of a wider trend in the data.

Table 6.1 – Presentation and Discussion of Findings

6	Experiencing Emotion at Work
6.2	The Workplace as an Emotional Arena
6.3	Emotion Management
7	Experiencing Workplace Learning
7.2	The Workplace as a Learning Environment
7.3	Understanding of Workplace Learning
7.4	Reflection and Learning at Work
8	Experiencing the Interplay between Emotions and Workplace Learning
8.2	Emotions as Learned Experiences
8.3	Workplace Learning as an Emotional Experience
8.4	The Embodied-Relational Being: Linking Emotions and WPL

6.2 The Workplace as an Emotional Arena

The experience of emotions at work is understood here as including both the displayed feature of emotions, what we show (Fineman, 2003), such as the emotional performance, and the related aspects of emotion management such as pecuniary, prescriptive, presentational and philanthropic emotion management (Bolton, 2005). In this chapter, I position the workplace as a socio-emotional field, embedded within powerful cultural and organisational discourses about emotions, relationships and learning. This section is devoted to the first theme: the workplace as an emotional arena (Fineman, 1993). This theme strives to capture the emotional trajectories of HRD professionals' days in their workplace, from the micro-perspective of the most prevalent and publicly displayed emotions reported by participants, and observed by the researcher in that context, such as fear, anxiety, anger, empathy, joy and interest.

Individual feelings and emotions were present throughout the entire research process, in interviews, observations and stories. From the very first meeting, I observed that participants revealed their emotions through their questions, comments and non-verbal expressions (e.g. vocal tone, body language, movement, touching, physical distance, facial expressions). These, in turn, aroused new emotions in other participants as well as in me. Some feelings and emotions had emerged as early as Head Office's presentation to participants of the idea of becoming a research site and fluctuated from enthusiasm about engaging in the new experience to apprehension about the time it would take away from work, from curiosity about what would really happen during the study to panic about saying something wrong. For example, one participant said:

I didn't know what I felt at first but was scared that it would put me on the spot ...about saying things and getting me in trouble ... Now, I don't feel that way any more. (Rachele)

According to Fineman (2003), *feelings* are essentially private and subjective experiences. *Emotions*, on the other hand, are the public performance of feelings, either authentic or simulated (Fineman, 2003). I understand emotions as multi-dimensional complexes (Burkitt, 1997). In this view, emotions are more than just psycho-biological states or processes. "Rather, emotions are mostly experienced and shaped by interactions with others; they are framed and reproduced through language and social practice" (Sieben, 2007: 564). The following parts of this section illustrate multiple manifestations of emotions at work using the participants' own words and my interpretation of these elusive and multi-dimensional processes. The list is by no means complete, nor do I claim to have exactly labelled any of these emotions.

However, what is included here is sufficient to show how the workplace is effectively saturated with feelings and emotions. It should be noted that the research site, that is the HRD Office of ABC Bank, was undergoing a corporate change programme at the time of my fieldwork. That programme implied new procedural rules to follow, new technological devices to use, and a new hierarchical organisation of the Human Resource Division which directly affected the HRD Office itself.

Fear

Fear was found to be a powerful emotion shared and manifested by the majority of participants. Various types of fear were described as individual emotions depending on the circumstance. For example, Rachele related her situation to the changes in the work environment, saying:

I feel like a lot of people, who perhaps are I would say ... lacking commitment in my Office, are a bit like that because they are scared by what's expected of them.

(Rachele)

Rachele also disclosed that the majority of the colleagues to whom she was referring were women, but also some men. In the past the members of the HRD Office Rachele referred to were highly committed, but now they were 'frightened' by organisational expectations and as a consequence were experiencing low commitment to or alienation from their work:

... they are not facilitators of learning ... um ... and they're very scared of change ... they feel they're never going to be able to contribute on that front. (Rachele)

For Rachele, the challenge was centred on the changes in the workplace context. Continuing to talk about work challenges and commitment she remarked:

I can certainly relate to that, I really think those dramatic changes undermine my confidence in my job ... um ... and I'm not comfortable at work. (Rachele)

Another participant reported a particular incident with another co-worker:

Everybody is afraid of conflict with that person you know ... so they don't share with him ... Now, I just don't want to say anything ... because I'm afraid to hurt somebody's sentiment you know. (Romualdo)

That fear of conflict existed in other participants, and communicating it to someone else not only generated that fear in other people but also reinforced one's own belief in the existence of that shared emotion. Sometimes members of the HRD Office could detect emotions in others through non-verbal communication symbols that reflected culturally specific indicators of particular affective states. In this regard, Romualdo explained that, in some cases, he was able to read the most imperceptible signs of other colleagues, to the point that he "knows when so-and-so is pleased or frustrated". In other cases, individual emotions of fear were described but not detected by others:

A big part of the problem is that ... um ... I was too afraid to ask for help because I was afraid that colleagues would see how little I know ... and if I asked them questions then they would realise 'he doesn't know anything'. So I was very hesitant to ask somebody to help me. (Pietro)

When other participants talked about their first experiences of learning their job, or those they observed in others, there was no recollection that this particular colleague (in the extract above) was afraid or not afraid to ask for help. Nevertheless, his perception of fear influenced the way he ended up working and learning at work all on his own.

Sometimes the individual emotion of fear was recollected by the participant, but he or she felt helplessly caught in a vicious circle, having the same instinctive reaction time after time. For example, fear came up at times as a way of avoiding conflict:

Yes. It really happens but in a detrimental way and ... there's a sense of 'I do not want to offend people' ... a sort of fear of conflict, certain words remain unspoken ... I have this fear that often we try to accommodate each other so much, that we are not open ... um ... not honest with one another you know. We should be more honest. (Rosalina)

During this interview session, and explicitly communicated informally after the interview, was the participant's frustration with the situation and the feeling of being unable to improve it or to do something about it. It was also reported by participants that conflicting inner feelings lead them to ambivalence and anxiety about what to do, and often the emotional reaction to be inferred was inaction.

I flew first class for work on one occasion ... But you know ... it was time of cost-cutting measures and some colleagues found a cheaper way to fly first class ... Now, I'm just noticing the conflict and I'm worried about what somebody would say, I mean something like 'he was a greedy' ... so-and-so ... but that wasn't said. I'm not just afraid of being a greedy or ... you know ... the way I see the world ... I fear they feel that because I do those things that I expect other people in the Office to do those things, and I do not ... but it's up to them. I feel a bit anxious about that situation and I do not know how to deal with it at the moment. (Roberto)

There seems to be a very thin layer in the participant's consciousness separating the 'I' from the 'We' when it comes to emotions or feelings. The general inclination was to have everyone else partake of the individual's negative feelings, as if no one wanted to be alone in feeling bad about another colleague.

When asked about a particular emotional incident, Andrea's response betrayed a need for collective approval:

I have to say that ... was violent at the time ... um ... I didn't think ... was that kind of person, and I really got offended. I got upset with him, and our relationship has changed, that trust is gone. I would say without fear that that changed the HRD Office when it came to the trust of that colleague. (Andrea)

Andrea reported to me that he discussed this incident with some other HRD professionals and they all shared Andrea's feelings, showing sensitivity to the emotional outburst by other people and emotional closeness to their co-worker. The subject of fear came up again in the context of diversity and, in particular, in the context of not letting go of the old way of doing things in the HRD Office.

I feel that with diversity comes conflict ... you know ... and with conflict comes emotion, because we value what each colleague brings to the table ... um ... but we are setting ourselves up for conflict. We're too afraid to let loose of the old way of thinking you know ... the old way of doing things around here. It seems like it doesn't matter any more. (Roberto)

In general, I observed that feelings of stress or inadequacy, building to fear, lead to apprehension towards the whole experience of working during a period of dramatic change. As a result the majority of participants reported experiencing a lowering of commitment, not only to the activity causing the issue, but also to their work and to their organisation in general. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that fear is also a basic and positive mechanism of self-preservation, and it is crucial for survival (LeDoux, 1996). In this regard, some participants described fear as an important motivator because they felt that fear helped them to deal quickly with some relevant interpersonal encounters they had in the workplace.

In short, fear supported participants in their behavioural adjustment to the ‘new reality’ they encountered in their daily work experience. It seems, therefore, that the fear for the future, caused by the uncertainty about the present, should remind us that our physical bodies are located within the inexorable linearity of time (Skinner, 2004). Moreover, despite the experience of fear, we have to go on, with our everyday work and with our lives (Skinner, 2004).

Anxiety

Participants reported that not only fear but also anxiety was mainly triggered by organisational changes. Fear seemed an emotional response to something that participants perceived as a ‘real’ threat to their life-world. Anxiety was often reported as an unresolved or ‘carried over’ fear from former learning experiences and appeared to contain some psychological elements that may have had no direct connection with a ‘real’ threat to participants’ life-world. In fact, anxiety is a response to an unclear or ambiguous stimulus, and an evolved defence system that has served to protect organisms from survival threats (Ohman, 2000).

For example, Renato revealed that:

I feel uneasy here ... here at work you know, because I do not receive all the information I need to do my job professionally. The new way of doing things ... um ... the new technological system makes me feel anxious about doing my job.
(Renato)

Participants’ feelings of uncertainty and confusion produced anxiety associated with their role. One HRD professional explained the reasons why:

I do not feel I have enough guidance here at work ... I mean in terms of what I should or shouldn’t do. I’ve done what I think is appropriate, but I do not know

whether it is the expected thing to do and I am a bit anxious about the situation.

(Pamela)

Another insight to emerge from the findings was how some participants appeared to recognise the ambiguity in their roles and gave accounts of how they tried to deal with this situation of uncertainty and conflict. One participant described how he was unhappy with his new role but he had to put his feelings and emotions aside in order to get on with the job:

I see my role as supporting and supervising colleagues in training and learning at work, and going in and reflecting with them in practice and whatever. So it's about establishing networks and you know ... it's about being present quite often. That's what this role is; but now there's not much I can do about it. My feelings seem irrelevant. I have just got to get on with the job that I've been given to do at the moment. (Roberto)

It is possible to infer from these data that participants experienced uncertainty and conflict as a consequence of ambiguity and lack of guidance in relation to both their role and place in professional practice. Some participants described anxiety as a result of their relationship with their supervisors.

Pamela told me that:

I think that the first time I was really anxious was when I switched supervisors. The supervisor I had first was ... um ... a lot more laid back. She was helpful and gave feedback. The new supervisor was a lot more involved in the moment-to-moment process and he made me anxious at the beginning because he made me really conscious of the mistakes I had been doing for a long time. He made me doubt my skills. (Pamela)

Another participant added that:

My anxiety in the beginning of professional work was about my relationship with my supervisor ... I felt as if I did not live up to her expectations ... this relationship made me question every word I might say ... I was worried all the time. (Pietro)

People experience anxiety in different ways. In an effort to explore how anxiety presented itself in their experiences, HRD professionals were asked how they knew that they were anxious. Most of them reported experiencing body sensations and emotional reactions.

I had sweating and dry mouth, and heart palpitations, and shallow breathing. The physical symptoms went away pretty fast but the dread ... you know ... I felt took a long time. (Rosalina)

My heart rate increased. I just wanted to run out of the room ... mostly a tense feeling and ... um ... just not wanting to be there. (Barbara)

I identified it as performance anxiety and that is how I felt I was anxious. I hadn't got any body cues but I noticed that I was very defensive of my work ... when my boss said anything I was ready to defend my work and give explanations for everything. That is how my anxiety came out. (Riccardo)

The majority of participants who experienced anxiety at work tended to cope with that experience by talking to colleagues and supervisors. Rosetta felt that others were aware of her anxiety due to her open communication about it.

I talk about it often now ... I think my supervisor can tell sometimes because I will still have trouble remembering what she said on the phone but that's about it. (Rosetta)

Marco also told me that:

Yes I think people are aware of other people being anxious ... I have just learned to be more open about it. I find it useful to be more open about it. (Marco)

Finally, I noticed that most of the participants felt less anxious when they saw improvement in their professional abilities. In this regard, Gina suggested that the ability to take feedback without defensiveness and the ability to take advantage of that feedback was the difference in her experience of anxiety.

I feel like I can take feedback now. I am like a sponge you know ... absorbing everything. The feedback has not changed much but I am able to take the ideas from supervisors and integrate them into something that is useful rather than put my guard up. I am okay with less planning time now, where I do not feel I would have been before. (Gina)

It could be argued then that anxiety, like fear, was experienced by participants as a mix of positive and negative emotional states, as well as with specific and individual connotations.

Anger

It was evident during my fieldwork and analysis that another powerful emotion, that is anger, was also a cause of mixed feelings about work. Anger came up repeatedly in the interviews, in a variety of contexts and for different reasons.

The main issue of concern for Rachele, for example, was the *ad hoc* allocation of training, seldom talking about the same subject from year to year. She commented:

So ... and it's a managerial thing and you see ... I just don't get it. I don't get it and it makes me so sad. The arbitrary allocation without consulting, the lack of consultation gets me really angry. (Rachele)

Rachele also expressed anger and annoyance about the expectations of her professional unit. She told of excessive workload, being scheduled a full training workload comprised mainly of subjects not previously taught by her.

Rachele's story is one of diminished involvement, in fact reduced to the level of alienation, expressed in the form of anger. She was also working on a solution to her anger, disclosing "I was ready to quit last week actually I was so furious ... um ... I'm sort of looking at my exit strategies". Roberto also told a story of anger towards what he perceived to be inadequate management and poor decision making, essentially the organisation. Although initially he described his feelings as 'hurt' or 'frustration', this understated the issue for him, and his demeanour gave way to the related emotion of anger. He spoke of a recent organisational programme that he considered to be unsuccessful, saying "... we had no choice in the matter, and yet those that forced it upon us are not going to pay any price whatsoever. That was certainly unfair and made me angry and frustrated". Pamela held similar beliefs to Roberto, expressing anger about what she perceived as poor management in the workplace. She was particularly concerned about the apparent low regard for people manifest in contemporary organisations, remarking:

What's totally depressing in this place is the people that run the business, that's what really makes me angry. Pretty strange that they think they've got to keep squashing people instead of building them up. Can't figure it out ... you know. (Pamela)

Another participant expressed anger in depicting the difficulties that he faced in his day-to-day work. Romualdo described his philosophy as "... and that is, never work with incompetent people ... I will not work with them". Romualdo also indicated that his current colleagues were "lovely people", but that his high level of engagement in working activities could be seriously compromised by being forced to work with less competent colleagues.

Participants in this research often felt that they had been treated in a disrespectful manner and spoke of how others' arrogance and rudeness irritated them and Rosalina talked passionately about another colleague's insolence:

He repeatedly comes in late ... he is not quiet about it and is incredibly loud ... When he comes into the Office everything is disrupted, everything is disturbed. If you're holding a meeting he will talk about it, if you're on the phone his voice is just so loud there is complete lack of respect for what is going on in the Office at the time. (Rosalina)

Several of the participants felt that becoming angry influenced their work:

... it spoils your work output ... your work deteriorates because you are not focusing your attention on the work you are doing. You are focusing your attention on the anger that's built up ... and what they've said to you. (Rosetta)

These findings show that anger can lead to participants carrying out a number of maladaptive behaviour (for example, low commitment, work withdrawal) which are likely to have some negative effects on organisational relationships, motivation and emotional climate. All these findings should encourage managers and practitioners to take workplace anger seriously, and enable them to take action in order to support organisational development interventions such as good communication initiatives and support systems programmes.

Empathy

Although participants experienced fear, anger and anxiety, they also experienced empathy for one another. Empathy, sympathy and compassion are all emotions triggered by another's emotional state or situation and they imply some degree of care or concern for other people (Kanov et al., 2004; Davis, 2007; Schmitt and Clark, 2007; Hoffman, 2008).

They are relational in nature, occurring in and through interactions and connections between people. Empathy was displayed mainly as an emotion-related phenomenon, characterised by compassion, care, sympathy and concern for other colleagues. Various examples of interpersonal empathy were reported by participants. For instance, it took the form of supporting each other in daily working activities. Paolo put it in terms of mutual respect and concern for each other in the Office:

As long as the work gets done ... and as long as other colleagues in the Office are taken care of, then that's the main thing. (Paolo)

Empathetic activities were also publicly displayed in the form of moral support. Someone who, because of low seniority and cost-cutting measures, perceived that her job was at risk reported feeling the Office's emotional caring manifestation:

I observed that anytime I've alluded to, like, a layoff or "I'll be the first to go and stuff" ... the other colleagues in the HRD Office were sort of like ... um ... very kind and supportive you know and said "Oh, no, don't worry about it. We're not there yet and you know and we'd hate to see you go". So I mean it – they showed their emotions that they sympathised with me, that they thought that things would be okay and tried to give support like "don't worry" ... you know. (Alisa)

Giulia also spoke of empathic concern and compassion for others as a sign of commitment, remarking:

I think that one of the expressions of lack of commitment is lack of compassion ... you see ... lack of showing enough concern for colleagues or clients. I think if you are committed to something you display higher levels of empathy ... (Giulia).

Giulia continued by saying that she perceived empathy to be the domain of both men and women, and found the gendered nature of empathy to be "... somewhat reasonable ...". Giulia also told a story about the compassionate commitment of two female HRD professionals in the Office who had "... taken on considerable administrative workloads when it wasn't their first love, not really what they wanted to do". She explained that in her view the empathic attitude shown by these two women was probably based on a sense of obligation to their work and colleagues. Rolf also associated commitment with the themes of compassionate and empathic attitudes. Asked what he perceived in other people that made him believe that they were committed, he said:

People actually feel emotional connection with others. I think a sympathetic attitude is important. They do not come into work and do these long hours for nothing ... they care about training ... they care about learning and about other colleagues ... That what I see as emotional connection with your work and workmates. (Rolf)

Andrea also spoke about a female colleague who not only had an empathic attitude, but coupled this with commitment to people and the organisation:

I believed every aspect of what she did reflected her whole persona ... and what she felt was her commitment to training and to learning, as well as her commitment to people ... um ... to the organisation ... so you knew who she was ... there wasn't like this falsity in regard to it. (Andrea)

Empathic and compassionate attitudes were expressed among participants in the way they supported each other in times of personal problems. In the following example, not only was a participant helped by colleagues covering her work, but also they made extra effort to set her mind at rest, to allow her to take care of personal health problems:

... the basic feeling was that ... you know ... do what you've got to do in order to recover from your health problems. So do not worry about getting back to work here too soon. We'll cover for you ... um ... we'll do whatever it takes to make sure your work ... just go. And I think we were all very supportive of that, and I believe she was very appreciative of that as well. (Karine)

The majority of participants seemed to understand that helping one is equivalent to helping all. Finally, a feeling of pride was also conveyed, in relation to being considered an empathic and supporting “brother or sister”.

Joy

Several HRD professionals gave accounts of having passion for aspects of their work life, actualised by strong feelings of enthusiasm and joy. Those interviewed described joy in different ways, from their own perspective. In general terms, joy was defined as an intensely positive and vivid emotion that arose from internal states or resulted from external events. Four general sub-themes were identified: the work itself, colleagues and relationships, the self and the work environment. Riccardo described two senior HRD professionals who were so driven by their work that it became almost an obsession for them. He associated joy and enthusiasm for work with commitment to training and learning, and to the organisation. Riccardo also noted that positive emotions, such as joy, had the potential of making the workplace a much more pleasant and engaging environment. Some other participants spoke of colleagues who displayed their real passion for work and engagement.

For example, Rolf explained that:

I think you can recognise commitment and joy in people. You've only got to listen to their conversations or watch them working, the degree of knowledge they've accumulated, passion for their activities, I guess their networking to create a larger knowledge base, and I recognise passion and joy with quite a few people, the areas they're working in. (Rolf)

Alisa also told a similar story about her commitment to and joy of learning, linking it to:

A great joy of learning and helping others to learn ... I didn't realise that until last year, I always believed I saw people were enjoying this and that and wondered why I've been looking and looking and so now ... I desire to do the best I can with my own training and learning, and with other colleagues that I work with. I always aim to do the best I can. (Alisa)

Alisa's story implies high levels of emotional, physical and intellectual energy channelled into her work activities. Further, talking about colleagues and relationships one participant reported that:

I enjoy the discussions in our team. We understand and help each other. As a consequence it is a lively context and not everything is bad. (Gina)

For most participants, their joy was communicated outwardly through specific behaviour, such as laughter, smiling, being excited, and was noticed by other colleagues. I was also able to observe some of these expressions of joy during my fieldwork, especially in women. Some talked about the experiential component of joy, that is "having a light and happy heart", whereas others referred to the psychological aspects, that is "inside I feel warm and excited" and "it's a sense of accomplishment", which are both features related to the general theme of the 'self'.

In fact, emotionality can be imagined as a circular process that begins and ends with the transactions and experiences of the self in the social situations interacting with itself and others (Denzin, 1984). The emotions that radiate from the self through the person's stream of consciousness, in the process of being lived, plunge the person and his/her associates (e.g. partners, colleagues) into a wholly new and emergent reality constituted by the emotional experience itself (Denzin, 1984). When asked if the organisational environment did anything that improved their sense of enjoyment at work, most of the participants said that ABC Bank did not have an active role in improving their experience of joy at work. In other words, joy was mostly experienced as an individual emotion. Nevertheless, participants identified some examples which illustrated that ABC Bank had a role in the matter: the creation of a positive work environment, provision of benefits and compensation, provision of adequate resources to get the work done. Participants in this research also experienced a sense of joy through their work and relationships, despite turmoil and challenges in the organisational environment. It seems that joyful people may positively affect the quality of relationships in the workplace. In today's world of workforce shortages, this knowledge can be useful to organisations that are attempting to create a more positive work environment, and useful for their internal decisions as well.

Interest

Curiosity associated with the emotional state of interest was a critical factor in many individual and interpersonal processes experienced by HRD professionals at work.

Interest is an ‘approach’ emotion which fosters exploration and development and provides motivational support for sustained goal-directed activities (Izard, 1977; Scherer and Tran, 2003; Silvia, 2005; Fredrickson and Cohn, 2007). Renato, when talking about his work, explained that it was “intriguing” and that he had “always wanted to know about human resources and training”. His interest in these topics, then, addressed an intellectual desire to know. This participant clarified that:

I found myself reading a lot about human resources and training, I just wanted to explore these subjects thoroughly. It all interested me. (Renato)

This knowledge helped him to be more sensitive to the needs of colleagues and to make tough decisions. Barbara also reported that her natural interest in new and unusual topics influenced her training sessions in the workplace.

In particular, she mentioned the fact that:

It helps to have a specific and peculiar topic that interests you. When I’m doing on-the-job training I find much less information if I’m not interested. This is true for many things in my life ... you know ... hard work that doesn’t appear like hard work is easier. (Barbara)

These extracts show how some HRD professionals may find work interesting because they may experience, while working, something new, unusual and interesting. Curiosity and interest also stimulate people to work better and to get new knowledge which, in turn, enables more things to be interesting. In this regard, another participant said that:

I’m always looking for a challenge ... um ... I really dislike boring stuff. In activities that bore me I do worse. I like interesting and stimulating stuff because they are rewarding experiences. (Riccardo)

It seems that interest attracts people to new and unfamiliar experiences in the workplace.

These experiences may be trivial, whimsical or dangerous, but one never knows when some piece of information or new experience may be helpful. Interest is thus a counterweight to anxiety and feelings of uncertainty (Kashdan, 2004). Controlling curiosity and interest was, in the view of some participants, an important skill. Sometimes, ignoring the pleasurable aspects of new information seeking is what actually gets people ahead. Morena believed that self-discipline was necessary. As she explained during the third interview:

A lot of things interest me, but I have to kind of neglect some information because ... you know ... one can get lost or be overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of information you can obtain nowadays ... and that will probably not be relevant.
(Morena)

Another participant needed to be controlled when exploring an interesting task at work:

I had to face a new task and I was grinning from ear to ear in anticipation of the challenge. It seems odd to say but I felt like I was having too much fun. I felt I should stop indulging myself so much. These thoughts brought me back to reality.
(Karine)

The sense that curiosity and interest were hindered by the need to complete a difficult task was expressed by Pietro. Commenting on his work assignment he illustrated the conflict between interest in the task itself and the obligation to meet a deadline:

I got so distracted by everything that was interesting that I didn't organise well enough. The problem with my task was that there was so much that I reached halfway of the work and I realised that it was impossible for me to spend so much time on these things ... so I kind of had to change my mind. I really did find myself

limited by the deadline. I knew that if I didn't cut it short I would never be able to finish my assignment ... it would go in all directions so I really had to let go of that ... you know. (Pietro)

Curiosity and interest motivated many HRD professionals at ABC Bank to act and think in new ways, and learn about whatever was the actual target of their attention. It may be argued that intellectual curiosity and interest are the lifeblood of the desire to explore novel, challenging, and uncertain experiences in the context of the workplace.

6.3 Emotion Management

This section is devoted to the second theme of this chapter: emotion management. Drawing on Bolton's (2005) identification of various types of organisational emotionality, the findings from this section seek to show the complexities involved in the performance of emotional labour by HRD professionals at ABC Bank. It is important to highlight the fact that this research confirms the actuality of a distinction between emotion management skills in the workplace that are commercially motivated and those that are not (Bolton, 2005). It is also important to note that professions are governed by widely disseminated and formalised codes of behaviour, and that little empirical research has explicitly focused on the emotional labour of professionals (Harris, 2002). Specifically, the function of HRD professionals as developers of individual and organisational performance and learning provides a unique perspective on the emotional aspects of organisational life (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002). The notion of 'professional' seems associated with male working practices and behaviours (Lewis, 2005).

Given this, it has been suggested that the prescriptive category of Bolton's typology (emotion management related to organisational/professional rules of conduct) is gendered masculine, while the philanthropic category of Bolton's typology (emotion management given as a 'gift') is gendered feminine because it is associated with behaviours expected of female employees, such as supportiveness, congeniality, offering rapport and empathy (Lewis, 2005). Therefore, the research findings presented here refer to emotion management (pecuniary, presentational, prescriptive, philanthropic) and its variegated nature. 'Pecuniary' emotion management is a category of workplace emotion that may be compared to Hochschild's (1983) term 'emotional labour'. It was performed by HRD professionals according to commercial display or feeling rules imposed by ABC Bank. Many organisations are adopting recruitment practices that entail role playing and psychometric testing with the purpose of recruiting the 'right sort of person' (Morris and Feldman, 1997; Lashley, 2001). For example, one participant admitted that:

... somehow I feel that we are not allowed to be stressed or frustrated here in the workplace ... um ... it is our job and we have to do it and not complain about it.
(Andrea)

However, according to Callaghan and Thompson (2002):

... [there can be] tension between the [mobilisation] of employee attitudes, and the deliberate [moulding] and [standardisation] of such competencies is merely part of wider and unresolved tensions concerning the contested nature of emotional labour.
(Callaghan and Thompson, 2002: 233)

Another participant reported that:

You have to have the attitude that you are there to serve somebody you know ...
You're not an equal whether you like it or not ... the customer has to be taken care
of, and if the Bank wants you to be that way, then that's what you have got to do.
(Marco)

Rolf also added that:

We have to be pleasant on the phone, demonstrate that we are 'professionals', we
cannot be short-tempered. Some people can yell at you for no reason and you have to
maintain a certain professionalism and composure. (Rolf)

Despite the implementation of comprehensive direct and indirect control mechanisms by ABC Bank, there is little in the above quotations from HRD professionals that they are using 'deep acting'. In this sense, organisationally prescribed performance can be seen as an 'exquisite drama', that is as a way of enacting the organisation's 'display rules' (Goffman, 1967). It seems also that those participants perform their obligations without ever 'buying in' to the norms set by ABC Bank. 'Presentational' emotion management may be compared to Hochschild's (1983) term 'emotion work', and it represents the basic socialised self who enters into organisational life with a basic understanding of how the game will be played (Bolton, 2005). A lifetime's social training prepares organisational actors (e.g. HRD professionals) with the traffic rules of social interaction in order to take part in the social game on a proper ritual basis (Goffman, 1967). In response to a question concerning how HRD professionals dealt with difficult situations, a large number of participants answered that they relied upon a sense of 'camaraderie'.

One participant explained that:

The other colleagues in the Office are the best thing about this job and the only thing that helps me when I'm feeling blue at work. We often manage to have a laugh during the day and that's you know ... makes the long hours and unpleasant working conditions bearable. (Romualdo)

The above statement seems to show that in situations where specific prescriptive organisational norms do not apply an 'unmanaged space' or a 'coping mechanism' (e.g. humour) may be created. These may be sites for resistance and misbehaviour or unmanaged activities that often work in the organisation's favour (Bolton, 2005). Participants also reported cases of self-monitoring behaviour which is one of the hallmarks of emotion work, such as:

Even though I was the manager, I mean the Head Office, I was made very conscious of having to cope with my image in this change process and not attract unwelcome stereotypes. (Morena)

Some pleasing stuff required an enormous investment in working out what was 'safe' or acceptable behaviour and being vigilant about not deviating from it. (Rosalina)

Morena and Rosalina's comments illustrate how they worked hard on their emotions in order to adapt their emotional display and their inner feelings to the different circumstances they faced in the workplace. Morena had to find a balance in her managerial role, such as being strong and resolute during the change process but at the same time not too strong as to attract critiques from employees. Rosalina had to put in place some 'pleasing stuff', that is she had to act formally and joyfully so as to please some colleagues from the headquarters, and she was able to do so while remaining emotionally 'safe' by maintaining a certain level of self-control.

Those statements from HRD professionals show how within the ‘presentational’ category it is possible to be many things to many people: close friend, colleague, adversary, practical joker, authority leader. Some of these roles may require quite hard emotion work. Although commercial and professional rules may constrain their choices it seems that organisational actors are in a position to consciously decide whether to put effort into making “their own feelings match the socially prescribed face or even whether to present the desirable face at all” (Bolton and Boyd, 2003: 299). ‘Prescriptive’ emotion management allows a detailed analysis of situations where an employee’s emotion management may be prescribed but not necessarily for commercial gain (Bolton, 2005). HRD professionals are required to continually ‘read’ the changing emotions of colleagues and clients, and respond accordingly, as well as supporting a working environment that is not too oppressive:

... to a certain degree you have to have a bit of friendship ... you have to be a sort of diplomat. You have to cope with colleagues and clients and try to build up a relationship ... um ... to exchange information. (Riccardo)

The HRD professionals’ emotional management skills can be classified as prescriptive because they are performed according to concepts of professional behaviour in the workplace.

The need to act as professionals when dealing with their emotional management skills was underlined throughout the interviews. For example, one participant noted that:

You have to be professional and self-promoting. You’re not going to get anywhere if you are not because there is so much competition. It’s a hard job ... you know ... you have to have a real thirst to want to do it. (Paolo)

In Paolo's quote the emotional element lies in the fact that he had to invest a great deal of his emotional energy in order to live up to the requirements and expectations of his professional role and some associated idealised image of it as prescribed by ABC Bank. Another participant said that:

I feel that people around me want a professional relationship. I mean if you don't adapt to that you cannot be successful. It needs trust to build a rapport with colleagues and you may gain a relationship with them but it's not like a relationship I'd build outside because that involves different feelings in my view. (Giulia)

This professional approach is deemed to increase the level of trust between HRD professionals and colleagues or clients, with too close an involvement potentially being detrimental to this trust:

I think that performing as a 'professional' brings trust to the relationship, especially with colleagues. They might trust you more. People tend to respect you and your opinion, but you shouldn't let too much of yourself come over ... you know. (Gina)

From these accounts we can see that the notion of professionalism establishes quite strongly that only certain types of emotions can be performed and that distance should be maintained between professionals and colleagues or clients. As HRD professionals they must provide the correct training activities required by the job and they must also provide their skills as learning facilitators, working according to certain standards established by ABC Bank and by the profession itself. Moreover, despite this emphasis on the need to be professional, tensions may arise between professional and personal involvement, with the latter proving difficult to suppress. These tensions require that HRD professionals involve themselves in active performances of emotional suppression.

As in Harris's (2002) study of the emotional labour of barristers, the suppression of emotions is considered to be the hallmark of professional behaviour and expertise:

We are not emotionless! We get involved but we have a kind of line between the involvement and you see 'this is not my case' ... um ... I do have a line. (Alisa)

It's not a matter of not caring. It's about ... well ... we have a certain standing as HRD professionals. Some days are more emotional than others, but on the whole you have to go on working and living ... you have to keep a balance between professional and personal involvement. (Paolo)

There is, therefore, evidence to suggest that HRD professionals react to prescribed feeling or display rules in a myriad of different ways, and that professional competence is usually associated with emotional detachment. 'Philanthropic' emotion management demonstrates how organisational actors may not only follow social or organisational rules but may also decide to give that 'little extra' during social exchanges in the workplace (Bolton, 2005). In situations where people purposely offer extra emotion work as philanthropic, this emotion is given to other people (e.g. co-workers, clients) as a 'gift'. This can lead HRD professionals to go beyond professional rules when trying to help, for example, other colleagues:

As I walked past the coffee machine a colleague fainted. I crouched down to assist and he immediately started to cry. I tried to calm and reassure him. It was a bit shocking for me but I did not mind. I was happy to help somebody ... I felt a better person. (Pietro)

This participant did not merely adhere to social feeling rules in helping to restore order and dignity to the situation. He offered 'deference and demeanour' (Goffman, 1967) to care for another human being as a fellow social interactant, not simply as another 'colleague' of ABC Bank.

The ability to give emotion management as a gift is vital for social life, because it helps to maintain or restore a sense of stability, and to establish a precedent of reciprocity (Bolton, 2005). The HRD professionals themselves are well aware of the tensions that may arise between prescriptive and philanthropic emotion management, and the potential for the creation of a contested terrain between themselves and the managers they are working with at ABC Bank:

... we as HRD professionals are closer to the emotional situations of colleagues because we work together for those long hours you know ... Managers are not continuously there and they see a snippet of our lives in the workplace ... Sometimes in discussions we do not hear each other's argument because we seem to be on a different pathway than that managers are. (Roberto)

It seems clear that despite the emphasis placed by participants on the need to be professional, they also want to go beyond this because they frequently witness the difficulties encountered by other co-workers in the Bank. Thus what is clear is that HRD professionals are active social actors who are capable of displaying critical agency in their ability to adapt their behaviour to different categories of emotion management.

6.4 Conclusion

The empirical findings and thematic analysis related to the experience of emotions at work have been presented in this chapter, in order to answer the first research sub-question: How do HRD professionals experience and make sense of their emotions in the workplace?

This emotional experience has been identified as being constituted by the emotional performance, what we show, and by the related aspects of emotion management (pecuniary, presentational, prescriptive, philanthropic). Emotions in the workplace have been found to be embedded within powerful cultural and organisational discourses, and connected to the corporate change programme that ABC Bank was undergoing at the time of my fieldwork. The empirical findings show how the study participants describe their emotions in the workplace as a combination of positive and negative experiences, that is as a complex and ambivalent ‘emotional arena’ shaped by social encounters. HRD professionals seem to adapt their behaviour to different personal and socio-professional rules, in order to cope with the passions and frustrations they find in their everyday working lives. It also appears that, to some extent, these professionals and ‘organisational actors’ are able to exercise their agency within the intense context of lived emotions in organisational life. In the next chapter, the findings related to the experience of WPL will be presented.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS II: Experiencing Workplace Learning

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings and analysis related to the experience of learning at work, in order to answer the second research sub-question: How do HRD professionals experience and make sense of their workplace learning? The experience of learning at work is fundamentally understood here as an experience of ‘change’ which refers to relations and emergent dynamics among individual actors and their working context (Billett, 2001; Fenwick, 2008). Workplace learning involves not only human change but also “interconnections of humans and their actions with rules, tools and texts, cultural, and material environments” (Fenwick, 2008: 19). Two main themes emerged from the analysis of empirical findings: the workplace as a learning environment; and reflection and learning at work. Participants’ different interpretations of workplace learning are also presented in this chapter. It is also acknowledged here that each individual extract has been selected as somehow representative of a wider trend in the data.

7.2 The Workplace as a Learning Environment

This section is devoted to the first theme: the workplace as a learning environment (Billett, 2001; Ellström, 2001). This theme strives to capture that form of learning that takes place as part of everyday work practices, aimed at enabling better participation in everyday work activities. Participation may be affected by social affordances and social constraints which are created and sustained through interaction between newcomers and existing co-workers.

It is also assumed that these social affordances and constraints are influenced by the nature of their relationships with the ambivalent and complex social system of the workplace. These two concepts, social affordances and social constraints, are used in this section to present the related findings of this study.

Social Affordances

Participants reported how social interaction and participation in work practices provided emerging opportunities for workplace learning by means of observation, shadowing, trial and error, face-to-face communication, self-motivation and by doing ('having a go'). Much of this type of learning seemed to be spur-of-the-moment and self-initiated, where participants recognised opportunities for learning social and professional knowledge and skills that would improve their working conditions. Further, these findings illustrate the reciprocity arising in the socio-cultural environment of the workplace where learning occurring between co-workers is assumed to lead to better participation in workplace practices. For example, Andrea described the adjustment process he experienced after joining the HRD Office of ABC Bank three years ago:

After finishing my education science degree four years ago, I started looking for a rewarding job. A few months later I started my new job here as a HRD professional. I was anxious to learn how things were done around here and wanted to fit in. At the beginning, I shadowed older colleagues I was working with. I used to watch them do it first and then I'd have a go. I believe that observation and doing is the best way to learn. When I first began to work here, I felt anxious about having too much to learn. I was scared of making mistakes ... you know. Thanks to the help and encouragement of my co-workers, I feel like I can now be valuable for the HRD Office without being anxious. Now I think that I'm a full member of the team!

(Andrea)

This story illustrates the experience of a new HRD professional, Andrea, who talks about learning new skills and knowledge at work. The social processes occurring between Andrea and the existing co-workers show how learning at work happens through ‘informal’ participation (e.g. observation, shadowing and doing) in this particular work team. Andrea’s learning experience underlines the importance of the social context in enabling workplace learning to occur as part of everyday practices in the workplace itself. During these processes, Andrea also learned the social knowledge that led him to successful integration into the HRD Office. When entering the new work team, Andrea described being faced with learning new procedures and professional skills that included new knowledge about how the job was done and the rules and values of the work team.

This story seems to suggest that Andrea was anxious to learn the social knowledge of the new work environment, and careful not to make mistakes in order to fit into the HRD Office. This desire to ‘fit in’ was made clear by his willingness to assimilate into the work team culture and ‘learn how things were done around here’. From Andrea’s description, this was an informal process of social interaction and asking questions so that social and professional knowledge could be acquired or improved. Andrea’s account also illustrates how social interaction and participation provided opportunities for workplace learning and helped to remove anxiety from Andrea’s experiences by learning the acceptable behaviour expected among members of the HRD Office. This was depicted in his reflection ‘thanks to the help and encouragement of my co-workers, I feel like I can now be valuable ... without being anxious’.

Another participant, Rosalina, reported how she was made to feel welcome by other colleagues in the HRD Office of ABC Bank. Rosalina was able to learn new knowledge and skills that facilitated successful participation in everyday work practices.

On my first day at work, everybody helped to make me feel at home. Everybody ... um ... was so sympathetic. They encouraged me learn more about my job. I used to watch what other colleagues were doing. I believed that everyone had something to offer and I liked learning new things. I have now been working in the HRD Office for five years and love to be here. I have been made feel welcome and as part of the group since day one. It's here that I have learnt the importance of trust and respect for workmates. (Rosalina)

This account shows what can happen when the positive experience of a new professional and the enabling disposition of the social environment come together to produce a positive work milieu for continuous and natural workplace learning opportunities. At the beginning of her journey, Rosalina faced feelings of uncertainty about the new job, and she 'used to watch what other colleagues were doing'. Rosalina entered the new work team and learnt the social and professional knowledge that paved the way for acceptance by other HRD professionals, and everyday participation in work team activities. Because Rosalina thought that everybody had something to offer, she watched them working, and appeared to be mindful of the social norms and practices that already existed in the HRD Office. She also seemed to be very interested in learning new things that were consistent with the work activities performed by other co-workers in an effort to fully become a valued member of their community of practice.

In this environment, workplace learning opportunities arose naturally as part and parcel of the social interaction and participation in the work team. It also seemed that this type of learning, sustained by Rosalina's willingness to learn new knowledge combined with an enabling work context, occurred as part of everyday practices in the workplace and was, therefore, 'unplanned learning'. Moreover, Rosalina stressed the fact that her positive experience of workplace learning was "a combination between good workmates and a good work environment". This suggests that the social context plays a significant role in enabling co-workers to learn the social and professional knowledge that is needed to perform well in the job. Opportunities for workplace learning are also provided by established professionals who may facilitate the transition of new professionals to the work team. For example, Giulia reported that:

I've been working here for over ten years. In the past, people would get a job and stay here. Now, we get new professionals on a regular basis ... These new professionals are employed on short-term contracts and this fact makes them insecure and anxious like a kid on the first day at school ... you know. Therefore, I try to make new professionals welcome. Although some of my colleagues do not even bother sharing their experience with newcomers, I like to have a chat with them and share my knowledge and skills with them. I think that communication and socialisation are useful ways of learning for all the people involved. (Giulia)

In this story, the insecurities and anxiety experienced by many newcomers are portrayed through the eyes of Giulia, an established HRD professional, who seems to be helpful towards those newcomers. This account indicates that in the past change was not a common feature in the workplace as long as 'people would get a job and stay here'.

Today organisational changes force employees to keep up-to-date and ‘now we get new professionals on a regular basis’. Giulia made a point of helping newcomers by offering her support and experience. However, as described in this account, this willingness to be helpful towards newcomers was not shared by all members of the HRD Office. Some established professionals did not bother sharing their experiences with newcomers. Giulia recognised uncertainty on behalf of new colleagues, and she believed that being communicative and friendly would be beneficial for all people involved in those social interactions. During this process, Giulia provided assistance to new HRD professionals, answering their questions or helping them to know more about their job. This interaction enabled a mutual process between newcomers and Giulia who was eager to share her knowledge and experiences with them. Giulia’s story illustrates the importance of the social context of the workplace in facilitating participation and workplace learning opportunities, and shows the feelings of empathy expressed by an old-timer towards newcomers. In the following story, an old-timer with over 20 years of experience in a work team, Paolo, described an approach used to welcome and share professional knowledge and skills with new colleagues.

I like working on my own and ... um ... in my job I don’t normally get the opportunity to share work with new people. I have a lot of freedom here at ABC Bank. By working alone, I can do what I like. It’s not that I do not like working with other people. I mean ... if the job requires more than one person, I like working with others in the Office. Sometimes, when someone new joins the team, I’m asked to show them around. This does not happen very often. When I have to show them around, I like to walk them around our Department, introduce them to the other people in the Office and so on ... During the walk, I like to share my professional knowledge. I have an authentic interest in human resources, training and skills, ...

and so I enjoy sharing it with other people when I get the chance. Everyone has something to offer and I enjoy learning with other people equally interested in those subjects. (Paolo)

This account shows the willingness of an old-timer, Paolo, to share his professional knowledge with other colleagues, and illustrates the notion of reciprocity in learning at work over a period of time. The account focuses attention on how an old-timer took responsibility to facilitate learning of co-workers and create participatory spaces for workplace learning to occur. This type of interaction can be beneficial for new professionals, because they are often keen to learn new knowledge about the job and the work environment in an attempt to socialise with other co-workers. This interaction can also be beneficial for old-timers like Paolo who enjoyed the interaction with new colleagues and looked forward to talking to them. In short, this account shows how social interaction between old-timers and newcomers encourages both parties to learn something new, share professional knowledge and provide information that is accurate and helpful to the job. Four stories have been reported here to exemplify HRD professionals' experiences and opportunities for learning at work and participation in the social context of the workplace. These stories have depicted the mutuality between HRD professionals and the work environment in enabling positive workplace learning experiences to happen and develop. Workplace learning took place through observation, shadowing, trial and error, face-to-face communication, self-motivation and by doing ('having a go'). The nature of workplace learning was natural, organised and, occasionally, random. In each story, the workplace was constructed as a positive learning environment through the experiences and interaction of old-timers and newcomers.

However, this is not always the case. The next part of this section will underline the challenges connected with the creation of a positive learning environment in the workplace.

Social Constraints

Participants reported how some structures and processes appeared to limit their learning at work, restrain their participation in everyday work practices and hinder the sharing of knowledge among them. For instance, Rosetta observed that:

I think that it is not easy to adapt to changes at work or learn new skills. Although I have been working here for some ten years, I still find it difficult to adapt to change. In the beginning it was difficult to adjust to change because there was little communication ... Nowadays changes in the way of working lead to more communication ... you know ... with colleagues and managers. This tendency has made it easier to express yourself, and so I feel less affected by changes. I feel that change can lead to valuable learning experiences at work and can help to interact with people. Through my experience I have accepted that change is unavoidable as well as that communication and cooperation are very important in our daily practices in the workplace. (Rosetta)

This account stresses the importance of structures in ABC Bank that, according to Rosetta, have limited her autonomy and, to some extent, her freedom of expression. These constraints were reported as being linked to problems of communication which seemed to have affected her self-esteem. However, over time, Rosetta felt that these hindrances have made her less affected by organisational changes. This account appears also to illustrate the capacity of the organisational environment to hinder opportunities for continual learning and improvement in the workplace.

At the same time, Rosetta seems to have learnt that organisational changes may have a positive impact on her confidence to deal with the daily activities performed at work. Rosetta gives the impression that she has learnt new skills in social interaction and communication. On the whole, the experience looks positive for Rosetta, who as reported in the story accepted that ‘change is unavoidable’ and that ‘communication and cooperation are very important in our daily practices’ at work. In summary, adapting to organisational change and learning new ways of interacting and communicating in a social context were significant issues for Rosetta in order to become a full member of the HRD Office, and in order to increase her self-esteem in the workplace itself. Another participant described how he was reluctant to share any social or professional knowledge about the job.

I have been working here for fifteen years and ... you know ... I find adapting to new people a challenge. A while ago, a new colleague on her first day in the HRD Office told me ‘Why are you doing it that way? That is not the right way, things have changed my dear’. It has taken me years to know what I know ... um ... and that episode made me wonder how could someone new tell me what to do. I began to be anxious about my work, and I decided not to share anything with that colleague. As time went on, I became more relaxed about that colleague because she was helpful and ... you see ... we started to get on well. I also started to share a little bit of my knowledge with her, though it takes time to build a trusting relationship. (Roberto)

In this account, Roberto expresses his initial reluctance to share knowledge about the job with a new co-worker. In the narrative, Roberto seems to be threatened by newcomers joining the HRD Office, and gives the impression that he dislikes receiving advice on how to do his job.

Roberto's story illustrates how adapting to newcomers can be a challenge, especially when newcomers interfere in the way other professionals perform their job. Due to Roberto's distrust of newcomers, he claimed ownership over the knowledge and skills he developed over twenty-six years of work at ABC Bank, and communicated his unwillingness to share those knowledge and skills with newcomers. Nonetheless, Roberto accepted, over time, the newcomer described in the story and understood that other people may help to make the job easier. Once some trust was established, Roberto found the job less demanding and the interaction with the newcomer developed. As indicated in the story, Roberto 'also started to share a little bit' of his knowledge with that newcomer, suggesting that the newcomer's access to knowledge was limited.

This account shows how the reluctance of co-workers to share their knowledge and to restrict access to important information about work practices may have profound implications for newcomers' workplace learning and for their capability to adapt to change and learn new skills. Restricting access to important knowledge may result in failure, with possible negative consequences for newcomers themselves. This story also indicates that workplace learning cannot be taken for granted. From Roberto's account, it can be inferred that preventing newcomers from accessing professional and social knowledge may lead to their unsuccessful integration into the work team, and may hinder their job performance too. Another participant described how changes in the workplace, over a period of almost 20 years, allowed her to gain new professional knowledge and skills through learning at work as well as enabled her to achieve a higher position.

In the following account, Rachele illustrates the dynamics of the work team and how new professional knowledge is learned, and underlines the strategies that are used in the work team to deny newcomers access to professional knowledge about the job.

I have worked here for almost 20 years. Over time things have changed a lot. I am a middle manager now and the job is more demanding and from 10 people only 5 remain in my team. The best part of my job is that in our team we all get along. Over time, we have learned to get on with one another. I mean ... one can say that we all trust each other. Nonetheless we don't like new people ... um ... and we don't like sharing our knowledge. Every now and then, we get new people working here who expect to have access to our knowledge. Why should we share it with them? The worst thing is ... you know ... that people do not listen. Over the years, I have learnt a great deal. It's been a long process of trial and error, but eventually this makes my job easier. The knowledge I have gained is mine, and I don't want to share it with anybody else. (Rachele)

This story illustrates how Rachele learned her professional knowledge and skills over a period of almost 20 years. This account also shows the bond and trust between co-workers who have been working in the same team for a long time. Over time, these co-workers have developed close relationships with each other and seem to have a mutual understanding about what type of behaviour is acceptable in the work team and how they perform their work. However, this account shows that problems arose when new people entered the work team. In this regard, change was an important element that influenced Rachele's attitude towards learning at work and interaction with other colleagues. Rachele reported seeing a decline in the number of original colleagues in the work team, which affected the social context of the team itself and presented challenges for newcomers.

The close relationship shared by co-workers in the work team produced trust and respect among them. Rachele acknowledged that learning how to do the job well was a result of many years of experience that is, ‘a long process of trial and error’. From this perspective, workplace learning can be described as a continuous process where the HRD professional is able to build on his/her original knowledge, and through social interaction with trusted colleagues is able to create a positive work environment for constant learning opportunities. It may also be noted that the length of time it has taken to gain professional knowledge and skills for the job, interfered with Rachele’s relationship and interaction with new colleagues. Rachele declared openly resisting newcomers to the work team and deliberately restricting the amount and kind of knowledge that she passed on to new colleagues. Rachele’s reluctance to share professional knowledge and skills with newcomers has implications for the way workplace learning occurs. The situation described in Rachele’s story becomes a social constraint for co-workers who are outside the original and trusted work team. Sometimes, HRD professionals are happy to share their knowledge, but only when they get the chance to know their new colleagues and trust is created between them. In this regard, Riccardo told me the following story.

When somebody is nice to me, then I’m ready to share knowledge with them. But if they are a threat to my position in the Bank I won’t share anything. I feel ... you know ... if I hold on to critical information I am more valuable to ABC Bank. I do not like it when newcomers join our Office. I start thinking about the worst things ... um ..., and every time I meet somebody from management walking around our ... Office, I think about being sacked or something like that. Of course, they just want me to help newcomers or they just need detailed information about the latest projects

in our work team, and then life goes back to routine. When I have the opportunity to know new people and trust them, then I'm willing to share professional knowledge with them. But only a little at first. The more comfortable I become the more likely I will share my professional knowledge with new people. I also share knowledge with older colleagues or with people of my seniority. I feel that in order to share knowledge you need to trust other people. (Riccardo)

In this story, Riccardo seems wary of newcomers when they first enter the HRD Office. This account highlights what is likely to happen when old-timers resist newcomers and raises some interesting implications for how old-timers may constrain opportunities for workplace learning to occur. This story also illustrates the processes employed by old-timers to afford or limit workplace learning in their interaction with newcomers. Older co-workers are powerful here because they hold the professional knowledge that is needed for the job. As depicted in the story, Riccardo will only share his professional knowledge about the job if newcomers adapt to the social rules existing in the HRD Office, and if they do not pose a threat to existing positions in the work team. Furthermore, Riccardo recognised that knowledge was only shared among colleagues when trust and respect were created. Thus, it appears that old-timers may control and restrict the flow of information to newcomers who are keen to learn the knowledge and skills needed for the job. In short, this lack of social interaction and communication may inhibit the sharing of professional knowledge as well as may limit the possibilities for workplace learning to happen. As a result, the HRD professional's disposition may produce some negative consequences for the social context in which newcomers can participate in workplace learning.

In sum, these experiences show how workplace learning occurs inevitably and constantly through professionals' engagement in their daily practices and social interaction, as well as how the relational process of workplace learning can be understood as being negotiated between personal and socio-cultural contributions but in a manner which is bounded by both personal and social agency (Billett, 2010). The different interpretations of learning illustrated in the next section of this chapter also helped to make sense of the workplace as a learning environment.

7.3 Understanding of Workplace Learning

The interview format and the fieldwork allowed the participants and me to begin with an account of past learning episodes and current workplace learning practices, and then to interactively interpret the meaning of these experiences. As a result, the experience of learning at work is interpreted within the context of the professional's life-long learning and within the context of his/her socio-cultural and working environment. Just as many different categories of learning have been identified in traditional academic work (Mezirow, 1981; Kolb, 1984; Brookfield, 1993; Collins, 1996), the nature of workplace learning is inseparable from the individual's interpretation of learning itself. One major difference in the interpretation of learning concerned the relationship between problem solving and learning at work. In this study, some participants distinguished learning at work from problem solving. Alisa, for example, revealed that:

I try to use whatever knowledge I have learned from University or from anywhere else and try to find solutions for everyday problems. (Alisa)

When discussing workplace learning, Alisa explained that at University you learn specific things because they are required, while at work learning is ‘purpose driven’ and more enjoyable. She also added that:

I think I learn from other people because they have more experience and they have good insight into the issues I have to deal with. This knowledge may be not directly related to what I’m doing but it changes my point of view about my work. I think it does influence my own way of learning at work. (Alisa)

Another participant, in a similar vein, reported that:

I start making some changes based on the idea of what’s happening and observing the results of those changes because ... you know ... without results I believe you don’t really learn anything. (Karine)

Karine also recalled things that helped her to learn, like hands-on learning experiences:

I can’t really think about learning. I think it is almost in the moment you get into something, it’s a process of clarifying what’s going on. I mean ... you gather information about it and begin to try to make sense of it, and that points to what is actually taking place. So learning is basically the moment you start really investigating. (Karine)

Karine was learning by approaching the problems she faced daily from multiple directions: getting information from other colleagues, working with hands-on trial and error and creating a visual representation of the problem in her mind. Morena also distinguished workplace learning from problem solving:

I was working on a new e-learning project and I wasn’t planning to learn at all, but I had to learn the technology that supported that project. I faced some problems but in the end I learnt how to implement that project. (Morena)

Learning seemed a subject that Morena was very comfortable with. She came up with stories quickly. She was confident in the stories and she appeared to enjoy sharing her experiences. Her learning episodes all related to her professional and analytical work. She pursued some topics mainly because she needed for her job.

I feel it depends on the situation. I go as deep as I have to ... but when I find the subject interesting by itself, I dig deeper ... I think I must find out more about that topic. (Morena)

In all cases, Morena was curious and seemed to have some interest in the new learning opportunities she identified in her profession. Other HRD professionals considered learning at work and problem solving to be part of a similar process.

One participant recognised that:

I feel that learning has been there and in large degree, through practice, through choices ... and we learn from real life situations. (Rolf)

Rolf was animated when he talked about learning and saw himself as a ‘continuous learner’. He took pride in his achievements, and his determination and ability to find lessons in all his life experiences seemed to facilitate workplace learning. Working in the Bank headquarters provided an opportunity to advance, do the work he loved, and it was also a fertile ground for workplace learning. Rolf’s first lesson at the headquarters was about the power of politics.

I think the big learning at work ... you know ... was about the political context of ABC Bank. It was about how the political context affects everybody, and how after a while ... you just learn life’s lessons by experience. However, I didn’t like what I was experiencing, I didn’t like the politics in ABC Bank. (Rolf)

The second lesson was about ‘personal strength and survival skills’.

The long and short of this story and the big learning was I got over many hurdles and I thought: ‘Dear Rolf you’re a fairly strong person. You just keep digging in now that you understand the game’. (Rolf)

He added: “I learned how to survive in that context without compromising my integrity and my moral principles”. He learned about people too as he looked at his original supervisor interact with others in the new political environment.

You see ... I’m learning about people that I ... particularly her. I’m very disappointed in her because I had a lot of admiration for her some years ago. But I observe how she acts and how she uses people and ... I don’t know ... She tries to get you to leave the Bank. And I’m not the only one to hold this feeling. (Rolf)

Rolf developed workplace learning through the politics at ABC Bank and he drew from his past formal and informal experiences to improve his survival skills and strength of character. While he drew from past experiences, information and expertise, he experienced those situations as new learning, new knowledge and understanding. Gina also highlighted the similarity between learning at work and problem solving. Gina was bright and very personable. She gave careful thought to the questions and provided interesting answers.

I have always loved to learn by overhearing conversations between people. So I think I’ve been influenced and learned from people I spent time with. Those people were the ones who encouraged me to try new activities and get involved in new things. (Gina)

Some of Gina’s stories of workplace learning included learning professional or technical details, others included interpersonal aspects of the job. All of her stories related to social interaction.

Gina recognises that she has learned things from listening to questions at staff meetings, listening to HRD professionals talk to each other and joining team problem solving activities.

One time I had a problem that had to do with going and asking somebody a question about the details of a brand new training course. I think it's better to have somebody who understands the whole project so that they don't miss something and you are more aware of the work to be done. In particular, I know there is a senior level human resource manager here who is very smart, and every time I go to her with a question ... um ... there is always something that she asks me that adds to my knowledge. (Gina)

Gina has been on both the asking and explaining end of these conversations, and she has learned in both cases. In addition to gaining professional knowledge, Gina has learned about business processes and social interaction too.

Some human resource managers were talking about a policy document on paternity leave, and hearing them was a good learning experience on how to interact. You see ... it wasn't necessarily a professional learning experience but learning how to go into a meeting and when you're asked a question you're not able to answer, and learning what to say and how to get the answer or how to manage those situations. (Gina)

Gina also told me an interesting story about a learning incident that happened at a staff meeting.

Usually they don't go into detail but that time she did stop and ask one of my colleagues if the question had been answered about a certain educational software. Then they discussed how to make sure that the installation of the new software didn't violate any of the procedures or safety regulations, and it's something I never ...

would have thought of and coming up with a pathway of educational software to be installed. (Gina)

Gina had a strong propensity to get involved in learning at work when she was interested in a topic. Gina's evaluation of her learning often provided other opportunities for her to interact with co-workers and other opportunities for additional learning. For instance, when she was learning how to deal with clients, she assessed her learning by either going and discussing with colleagues or by watching other people:

If I saw an interaction and I believed that was ... was the proper way to present the information to the client, and then if I was placed in that situation and presented that information the same way, if the resulting response was positive then I would think I learnt it the right way. If it is negative then maybe that's not the right way to answer the question. (Gina)

In a similar vein, Renato reported that:

I feel I learn from experience. So every meeting, every discussion is a learning opportunity because ... you see ... I'm trying to learn about the day-to-day strategic features of work, but at the same time learning about the socio-cultural aspects and the role that human interaction may play. (Renato)

While focusing on workplace learning, Renato's story underlines his attention to the world around him. Examining a meeting that he attended, Renato briefly depicted the topic of the meeting. His learning experience was broader than the topic on the meeting's agenda, and he related this experience directly to his own behaviour.

I imagine the next time I am in a situation like that, I just desire to be more cautious about my own behaviour, in order to collaborate with other departments in the Bank. (Renato)

Moreover, as Renato was working on some new projects, he described how he was learning the business needs of ABC Bank:

At the moment we have a lot of difficulties in hiring and staffing. So as we have to hire professionals, where do we place them? What are the priorities of the bank? Then there are discussions about people's training and our work can depend on what attempts we're trying to make in order to solve some specific problem. Sometimes it is a matter of looking at the market. We've got to be concerned about the reason why we need to keep somebody. We start learning more about the financial issues of the bank and about the competition out there. (Renato)

Renato also realised that he was learning a lot about the cultural context of ABC Bank:

I came from a culture of e-mail and interest in staff meetings. While working here I was thinking that ... I'm not getting a lot of e-mail messages. So this workplace ... I mean its culture is a little different. They're much more voicemail oriented ... In order to be constructive, you sort of need to discover what works for them. So it's another type of learning at work. (Renato)

A common thread in Renato's stories of learning at work was his application of his knowledge. In this regard, when he was asked when he was mindful of his learning about ABC Bank, he answered 'when I was able to be more competent and effective in my job'. Renato sometimes used his new knowledge about the cultural context of ABC Bank to change his way of interacting with other HRD professionals. For Renato, learning was the result of daily experience. When asked about the role of learning in his life, Renato proposed the following:

In short, now that I'm older, stimulating. When I think of that I can see many changes in my life ... I mean ... going from one culture to the next. What I do ... think is how boring life would have been without all those experiences. So I would

say that learning derives from experience and problem solving. Sometimes I reflect on what I've been able to explore and learn ... I'm very proud of those exciting experiences. (Renato)

Another participant, Romualdo, added that:

I guess that any problem you solve results in some sort of learning. Even today we had a couple of meetings which were ... I mean lessons learned ... like a meeting where there was a training project and something happened and as a result of it we just had another meeting so everybody was aware of what happened, why it happened and what should have happened differently. Now because these things come up more I think we kind of learn to pay attention and ask questions to try and understand the problem and solve it. (Romualdo)

Romualdo also learned about how to get along in the world, and many of his learning experiences at work came through his observation of the people and events around him. One of Romualdo's responsibilities was recruiting new professionals. The professionals he has been examining for a particular position had not been suitable candidates for the job, so he went to meet with the 'Hiring Office' of ABC Bank to discover what he needed to do differently. Romualdo came away from the meeting with a better understanding of the problem and he was able to obtain the data he needed in order to write up the recruitment information. He was also able to consider two aspects of workplace learning. First, he identified a need to restructure the HRD Office, and began to assess some changes that should be made:

Just two days ago, we were in a meeting to talk about two recruiting positions that were available. And as a result of our discussion, one thing led to another and ... you know ... I began to learn more about ... the organisational structure ... I wanted to ... to know how the recruits should be organised so that they could best employ their resources. Then I proposed to explore the issue in more detail. (Romualdo)

Romualdo learned more about the Bank's services too.

I also noted that they were looking for somebody with a specific skill set and as a way of clarifying what she wanted an employee to do, she actually took me for a walk and explained to me how the service should be provided and improved. So I learned about how the services of the Bank integrated together and about the type of skills they were looking for. This is what the new employee is going to be working on ... so it was clear I learned more about organisational integration. (Romualdo)

Romualdo's accounts of workplace learning might also be characterised in terms of taking advantage of opportunities for learning, which is not surprising as he remarked that 'I am that kind of person who thinks you learn something new every day in your life'. He described one particular incident when he changed his perception of an employee during a training session. This type of endeavour appears to be emblematic of Romualdo's style of learning at work:

Emotions mean everything to me. During training sessions, I learn a lot about people and how they perform and behave. Whenever I have gone with the impression that ... you see ... I felt was right it has been rare that it was wrong ... um ... If I have an eerie sensation I now go to search for facts to try and confirm that sensation. (Romualdo)

As anticipated at the beginning of this section, the above mentioned stories are examples of the distinction that some participants (Alisa, Karine, Morena, Rolf, Gina and Renato) made between learning at work and problem solving. Different interpretations of learning also became apparent by the diverse approaches that participants took to learning at work. Some HRD professionals provided examples of an adaptive or reproductive learning tendency while others provided examples better described as a developmental or creative tendency.

It is worth noting that the distinction between these two categories represents just two complementary levels of learning that are undertaken by all types of individuals in all types of professions. In the reproductive tendency or logic, the focus is on people's adjustment to and mastery of particular, specific tasks or situations (Ellström, 2006). In the developmental tendency or logic, the focus is on exploring, transforming and developing new solutions (Ellström, 2006). This latter notion has a close connection with Dewey's (1933) idea of problem solving and reflective learning. These features were evident among participants, and became apparent not in the type of learning that was performed, but in the individual's approach to learning at work that they described. In this regard, it may be interesting to compare Riccardo and Rachele's stories to Andrea and Giulia's stories. Most of Riccardo's accounts were simply associated with his experiencing and enjoying the committee meetings. He admitted that he relished the opportunity to hear how managers discussed information, and he stressed the fact that:

I had the chance to go to some committee meetings and ... and it was like middle and senior management get together and discuss questions and stuff like that. I've always liked attending those meetings because ... you know ... even though I had really nothing to contribute to ... it was ... um ... useful for my personal knowledge. I went to those meetings for listening and learning the way managers think ... and I learnt about one manager who often thought like the Bank's customers rather than as a human resource director of ABC Bank, which I found quite interesting ... I mean ... they constantly had their customers in mind when they tried to organise some sort of strategy. (Riccardo)

Riccardo's account shows his interest in those meetings, but at the same time it involves a passive approach to learning at work.

He explained that he liked to hear how managers and executives discussed information, and stressed the fact that he had really nothing to contribute to because taking part in those meetings was just useful for his personal knowledge. These comments seem to show how Riccardo was inclined to simply reproduce learning in some typical pattern of action. In addition, Riccardo did not relate the Bank's higher level priorities, such as clients, with his challenges at work. Even in the last interview when we explored the meaning of his workplace learning, Riccardo did not relate this to his own interactions with his clients. In a similar way, many of Rachele's stories included workplace learning that focused mainly on the adaptive logic and did not focus on the creative logic of learning:

When you learn in the workplace, you just learn how to carry out your work. You just learn those things you need. I mean ... at times you know something and at other times you don't know. That's life! (Rachele)

Andrea and Giulia's learning trajectories were quite different. Andrea's story stresses several creative approaches to workplace learning, such as relating new ideas to previous knowledge or problem solving skills and looking for regular sets of instructions or underlying principles.

The release of the new e-learning software was one month late and everyone was worried and saying 'You know ... we have to solve this problem before the end of this month. It is a major issue'. All I kept saying was 'From what I understand we should do a full test of it'. I thought it would be good to know the problem up front since we had to start the new e-learning course. And we kept trying things and then a technician from the software vendor came and helped us to find a solution. And you see ... all of a sudden we had all these data and everyone was getting interested. So we found all of the problems along the way and fixed a lot of big ones. In short, we finished our work and were able to start the new course in due time! (Andrea)

Giulia's account also shows her propensity to consider each learning incident as an integrative part of her experiences, which is typical of creative learning.

The main goal of that meeting was to evaluate the candidate for the position that had been advertised. 'Oh! This is what's happening in their company ...'. So that was unplanned learning ... um ... it just happened. It was a good chance to learn ... something that information was then used regularly. So knowing how your competitors behave allows you to copy their strength and to learn from their mistakes. (Giulia)

Giulia added that:

I believe that every meeting, every encounter, every discussion is a learning opportunity. There are formal meetings that are arranged and you go to [them] and you talk about some professional topics. But the informal learning that I hadn't planned to focus on in that meeting, was observing social interactions during the meeting itself and learning something about their employees. So that wasn't the purpose of the meeting, but I saw how people approached those topics during that time, what role they played and so on. (Giulia)

Those who tended towards a creative approach to learning had more informal learning experiences at work to share and richer accounts. They often made connections between unplanned learning incidents and between different experiences on and off the job. They usually provided more implications of their learning at work. In the above cited situations, participants knew there was an issue that needed to be addressed and sometimes there was also some unintentional or unplanned learning that fell beyond the purpose of their initial task. For example, when Romualdo tried to understand why his recruitment efforts were not resulting in suitable candidates, he was able to learn how to devise a new recruitment strategy that was appropriate to the needs of the 'Hiring Office' of ABC Bank.

At the same time, he learned that an internal reorganisation of the ‘Hiring Office’ was needed, and he learned more about organisational integration. Learning about the latter two issues was far beyond the purpose of his understanding of the problem, and far beyond his expectations of learning at work during that analysis. In short, Romualdo’s story seems to show how adaptive learning can be performed in the workplace.

7.4 Reflection and Learning at Work

Another learning theme that emerged from my findings was reflection, which was examined in order to understand how participants knew they had learned something at work. It has been suggested that reflection is the key to learning at work (Kolb, 1984; Boud et al., 1985), and that we should improve our consciousness of what reflection in learning can entail, as well as how it can be affected in order to hone our own learning practices. In this regard, Kolb (1984) integrates the term reflection in his notion of the learning cycle. Reflection is the first stage of a four-step process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). In fact, workplace learning can be considered as both an active and reflective process. Though we learn by doing, observing, talking and writing, we also learn by thinking about events and practices we undergo in the workplace (Kolb, 1984). This confluence of experience (action) and thought (reflection), involving both cognition and emotions (Boud et al., 1985), combines to generate new knowledge (Freire, 1973). The contested term ‘reflection’ is understood here as the relational practice which encompasses both the individual and the social processes that are critical for learning at work (Høyrup and Elkjaer, 2006).

From this perspective, reflection is a set of activities performed individually or in interaction with other people, which brings to the surface the socio-cultural, political and emotional data that arise from daily experience with one another (Raelin, 2002; Van Voerkem, 2003). Reflection is also concerned with forms of learning that aim to investigate the most fundamental assumptions behind our practices (Raelin, 2002). In this study, most participants used reflection-in-action and/or reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) to make sense of their ways of knowing, but they relied on experts or other sources as well. As HRD professionals experienced reflection at work, they had an opportunity to utilise their formal knowledge and professional practice to help them evaluate the situation and envisage their action. In the following examples, which can be associated with reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, participants provided some evidence that they were utilising formal knowledge and professional practice, seeing a situation as both similar to and different from other professional experiences they had previously encountered; what Schön (1983) referred to as ‘seeing as’. For instance, Pamela shared a learning experience she had during a meeting with a new manager. One of the things she reported learning was:

To not get caught in that situation where I was not in control of the training session, that I should have spent some time before we went out there to make sure I had organised the session thoroughly, that he knew what he was presumed to do, and I knew what I was presumed to do. (Pamela)

Pamela established that this learning was valid by stating that:

I think this was sort of valid learning because ... you see ... I related it back to previous experiences and thought it was the right way to organise the training session ... I mean ... I made assumptions that people knew what they were doing.

Wrong assumptions anyway. You have to clarify those assumptions and make sure that they are correct. Previous experience helped me to know that I was learning then and just being in the moment I knew that it wasn't the right way to organise stuff like that ... And on subsequent sessions I was able to plan and manage the situation a lot better than before. (Pamela)

Marco shared a learning experience where he not only discovered that he did not like another colleague's method of working within the team, but he also learned more about what was or was not the norm for team dynamics at ABC Bank. When illustrating how he validated his learning at work he claimed that:

In this situation I would say this was a kind of grey area, and it was difficult to say 'I am right or I am wrong'. And that was based on my assumptions about people's reactions in such a meeting. I haven't observed that level of interaction in the past. All of a sudden it was ... um ... strange. But it wasn't necessarily right or wrong. So if I were to end up that meeting and have some colleagues saying 'This is the way we interact here. We want people to talk openly and share their views'. Then I would have probably changed my feeling and said 'Well that's true. This is the way they do it here'. (Marco)

Marco went on to disclose that the reactions he perceived from other colleagues indicated that this was not standard practice for HRD professionals at ABC Bank, and that the behaviour he had observed was unacceptable. Paolo shared this story about how he confirmed his learning about people in the workplace:

I have been doing this activity for many years ... that if I have a ... well ... a strange feeling I now go to facts and try to corroborate that feeling. I try to do this because ... you know ... I have been stimulated to clarify that to people. 'What is it that you don't like? What happened?' I believe that the Bank has become more fact oriented.

You are so immersed in your daily tasks that you watch for everything. I mean ... you watch for language, facial expression ... um ... for everything ... any behavioural clues that you may get from people. (Paolo)

All of these accounts are instances of reflection-in-action, because they show how Marco, Paolo and Pamela were able to think what they were doing while they were doing it. Pamela while organising some stuff during her training session, Marco while working with some of his colleagues, and Paolo while immersed in his daily tasks at work. These episodes also seem to show how knowledge, or better 'knowing-in-action', reveals itself from our daily actions and transactions, especially when dealing with unexpected or uncertain situations. This practice of reflection is part and parcel of day-to-day management, where HRD professionals take action which will generate knowledge and this new knowledge will provide further opportunities for reflection on those experiences, and it will be useful for further practical activities or decisions. Reflection-on-action is the process of reflecting after the fact, allowing people to apply the lessons learned to later experiences. Morena provided good examples of both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action throughout her accounts. It was clear, during the interview sessions, that she was struggling to find ways to handle the challenges of her managerial role at ABC Bank. She described the process of reflection-in-action and the learning involved in the following terms:

When you walk down a road you may come to a perfect fork in your way, and you have to decide if you want to go left or right. When you walk down a road that has no forks you can go back and find a hidden path ... I mean ... sometimes there is a kind of hidden path along your way and ... there is a little path that you didn't expect to find there so ... you see ... as a HRD professional and manager if you go back a little bit sometimes it's not a bad thing at all. (Morena)

Morena also reported the following example of reflection-on-action:

I often try and translate my reflection into my experience. As I translate my learning into my professional practice, I will embark on the process of unlearning some of my previous beliefs. I will examine particular incidents and consider the values I have taken for granted and never really expressed. I believe that if I can really reconsider a particular position I have taken ... you know ... I can actually start to change the way of thinking that may have biased my approach to that situation. The first step to take is to articulate my views and understand why I think a certain way, and then ... um ... to challenge those views. (Morena)

It seems that Morena's approach to reflection shaped her personal learning strategy. As I listened to Morena, I was impressed by her attitude and her grasp of situations, and I thought that her approach would not be successful for everybody, because it was grounded in considerable expertise, special observational skills and a peculiar critical reflection capacity. Paolo pursued a methodical approach when he was asked to assess his workplace learning experience. His initial understanding of a problem or situation would occur 'at gut level', then he would apply his professional knowledge and experience to help him to solve that specific problem or to cope with that specific situation. For Paolo, however, the learning experience was incomplete until he had the opportunity of adequately testing his knowledge:

I use a journal to gather information, develop new ideas and reflect on them. I also test those ideas to see whether they really make sense ... Well ... it's a methodical approach to journaling and reflection. There's no real truth, but it's a process that helps me to focus on the reason why something is valid or not. (Paolo)

Another participant, Andrea, explained what assisted him in developing reflection and the criteria that guided his decisions on what to reflect on. Andrea reported that he reflected most on:

The things that I'm most uncomfortable with, that is my political views, my thoughts about management and so on ... Some time ago I was forced to reflect further on certain ideas I hadn't considered and ... therefore ... I was encouraged to challenge my own assumptions and viewpoint. (Andrea)

Andrea recognised that there were some personal issues, such as his political views, that he was able to reflect upon and this is evidenced in the above mentioned quotation as well as in some informal chat we had at the end of my fieldwork. Rosalina made an interesting observation about the relation between reflection and learning at work:

Last week I heard a quotation of Aristotle's that said, 'I will not ask you to prove that you are right. I will ask you to prove that you are wrong'. This was very profound to me, and helped me to learn how I should be looking at my reflective practice. I feel by asking myself why I'm wrong ... you see ... I will have a greater capacity for ... reflecting on my own assumptions and values. I think that this type of exercise can be useful to make me reflect and identify to myself my own biases, and thus I can always learn something new, or improve my abilities as a HRD professional. Ultimately, this is the best workplace learning for me. (Rosalina)

Rosalina's comments help to recognise that much of her reflection at work resulted from challenging her assumptions in reacting to learning stimuli. Paolo, Andrea and Rosalina's accounts are instances of reflection-on-action, because they show how these participants reflected upon their previous experiences in the workplace and how this reflection helped them to understand some problematic situations in new ways. Paolo through a methodical approach consisting in gathering information and establishing its validity, Andrea by challenging his political views, and Rosalina by looking at her reflective practice.

The recognition of a problematic situation seems to stimulate the learner to reflect upon the contextual circumstances which have led to the problematic situation, in order to pursue its resolution. The process of reflection at work was observed in newcomers and in more experienced HRD professionals. Pietro, a newcomer, provided another example of reflection-on-action. He was bright and interested in his job. As we talked, I could see how he was learning both practical and professional aspects of his job. He described workplace learning experiences where he learned how to interact with other colleagues or clients. He evaluated that learning in these terms:

Judging the answer of how ... maybe ... the third time around where ..., if I saw an interaction and I obtained what I thought was ... you see ... was the proper way to present that information or answer the question, and then if I was placed in that situation again and presented that information the same way, if the resulting feedback was positive then I believe I learned it the right way. If it was negative then ... maybe ... that was not the blanket response to how to answer the question. (Pietro)

Pietro went on to give an example of when he had followed this procedure to fix how he handled a problem with another HRD professional, and he defined reflection at the end of our interview session as:

I presume thinking about events or issues, evaluating the possible outcomes of those issues ... you know ... to get meaning from your experience or draw some kind of ... conclusions from what you did, to understand whether there's a better way you could have done it. (Pietro)

Gina had been working as a HRD professional for many years when we met. She gave another example of reflection-on-action, sharing this story about how she validated her workplace learning in relation to some meetings she was attending:

I do need to make decisions daily, and I appreciate input from others. I accept that reflection clarifies my standpoint or thoughts, and what I struggle to learn is how it makes me a better professional. I also expect to challenge and explore the perceptions and assumptions that I have gained via my personal experience and professional development through: considering other HRD professionals interpretations and ideas; questioning other colleagues and friends on their interpretation of various issues. And then I can see that when I go and say something positive, and I approach the meeting differently ... you know ... I have some positive feedback. (Gina)

Another young participant, Romualdo, observed that:

I think that it is easier to reflect on issues that you know something about. The new personnel policy is, for instance, difficult to reflect on, because it is an issue I do not know well. It is a lot harder to develop a pool of reflective issues on topics that you are really new to. (Romualdo)

This comment seems to suggest that reflection should be addressing the concern that arises between what is known and what is being presented to the learner.

Romualdo also added that:

Reflection essentially means ... I think ... being able to go back on to your ... looking back on your base knowledge and how you've grown. Essentially from what you learned ... from the various inputs you have in your work environment. (Romualdo)

In each of the above mentioned cases, participants based their stories on the repertoire of examples, understanding and actions that they have developed from their education, social interaction and experience.

They then took a particular situation, held it up to their knowledge and experience, discovered what was unique or problematic about that particular situation and decided how to take action. They also had “a reflective conversation with the situation” (Schön, 1983: 141) that is they effectively took action. For example, in Pietro’s story, he saw what he did wrong, tried a new way of carrying out his task based on his knowledge, and checked by observing other HRD professionals and seeing what outcome he obtained from the revised procedure. In Gina’s account, she tried to understand the feedback on her performance, did some initial analysis, verified with other colleagues she trusted, and experimented with a new way of attending her meetings in order to become a better HRD professional.

Schön’s general epistemology of practice seems to be the most important construct in this part of my research, and many participants used both forms of knowing theorised by Schön (1983). It is interesting to note that reflection can be seen to be closely associated with a deep approach to learning at work where formal education is integrated with personal knowledge and the development of relationships between parts of knowledge and a search for meaning. It is also interesting to point out that, in today’s chaotic working life, the pressure for efficiency increases and time for HRD professionals’ learning through reflection on work experiences may be eroded. Nonetheless, participants in this study did not report particular incidents of insufficient time for reflection at work. At the same time, they seemed to be sufficiently motivated to learn through reflection on their daily working experiences.

Reflection was a nearly ubiquitous form of learning at work, applying to most of the participants. Many of them had at least one episode where they relied on other forms of knowing as well. Alternative ways of seeing and doing can be considered as especially significant in the case of HRD professionals since exploring different perspectives will assist them in handling the complexity, uncertainty and uniqueness that are seen to distinguish today's organisational world (Stacey, 2001). Participants relied, for instance, on expert knowledge to validate their workplace learning. Experts are individuals or teams who possess highly specialised bodies of knowledge, ideas and skills (Garvey and Williamson, 2002). In these circumstances, the participant identified other people as experts either for their special skills or for their particular experience or for their specific knowledge of a field. All the accounts seemed to suggest that the experts had additional and adequate knowledge to assist participants in their working tasks. In this regard, Alisa stressed the fact that she worked in a team that was heavily involved in the study of international issues. Alisa had no expertise in that field, but shared stories of learning more about international issues from her participation in the team. When asked how she assessed her learning at work, in that context, she answered:

Well that's a good question. I think everything that I'm learning or observing from those colleagues is accurate because ... I mean ... they should know what they're talking about and doing. It's their business ... they're sort of experts in that area.

(Alisa)

Another HRD professional, Barbara, recognised the importance of networking as a means of gaining extra knowledge at work:

I feel I have some good supervisors who validated my knowledge. In particular, ... um ... some of them teach me and other HRD professionals how to network, how to enjoy and be successful at work. (Barbara)

Renato's story of learning at work involved staffing problems. Renato was a specialist in employee relations and when employees had issues to handle they would come to him. He sat in meetings with other human resource staff where he utilised his professional knowledge, and he shared this story about that experience of learning at work:

I used to take his [an HRD middle manager] word for it ... you know ... I believed it was like a legal matter. I didn't usually go back and try to check it because I trusted him. I mean ... he had years of experience ... he was an expert and so I took his word for it. I think I learned something from his sharing knowledge with me. (Renato)

In this study, there were also some situations where participants used multiple sources to validate their workplace learning. In the following story, Riccardo employed two methods for verifying his learning at work. He realised that his use of e-mail messages was ineffective. He found that he had more success making telephone calls or talking to the managers he used to walk with between meetings. In this situation, he utilised personal epistemology and social interaction to validate his learning at work:

Part of the matter was my own judgment because I didn't get the answer back I was expecting and ... and the fact that I had many phone calls and fewer e-mail messages. So that's another point that sort of confirmed. And then I spoke with Morena, my manager, who confirmed the fact that if I wanted an answer, it was possibly better to make phone calls. So a couple of convergent things ... you know ... It was working! I also used to talk to some managers from other departments in

between their meetings and follow them from one meeting to the next. It was a ... way of finding what worked for them. So what I was learning was it didn't bother them. So it was a different source of learning. Another atmosphere. (Riccardo)

Karine looked to multiple sources to validate her workplace learning too. In this regard, when Karine's supervisor provided her spontaneous feedback on how she was attending a staff meeting, she reacted by looking to other people and looking to her inner feelings in order to assess what she was listening to.

I remember that a strange feeling hit me ... something like ... Well is this the perception I give? And it was not only my perception ... you see ... I had some feedback from other people as well, but I bounce it back to my personal background. All at once I recalled that the day before the meeting I asked my son and my partner 'How do you see me?' ... I mean ... I think it is very useful to be sensitive to how your family and people may perceive you and ... and it may be different from your perception of yourself, so you can reflect on that and possibly learn something. (Karine)

Her son and her partner confirmed what she heard at the meeting, and Karine added that:

Well ... I believe you learn a lot from your family and from other people, and then you can talk to your friends or colleagues about those ideas and feelings ... I mean ... in the end, you have to be open and honest with yourself and try to find a balance between your personality and your cultural environment. (Karine)

7.5 Conclusion

The empirical findings and thematic analysis related to the experience of learning at work have been illustrated in this chapter, in order to answer the second research sub-question: How do HRD professionals experience and make sense of their workplace learning?

This learning experience has been associated with the image of the workplace as a learning environment, with a specific focus on the meaning of learning at work, and the connected aspects of reflection at work. This study has underlined two concepts that are useful for interpreting how workplace learning occurs. The first concept, social affordances, showed the importance of the mutuality between HRD professionals and the work environment in enabling positive learning experiences to happen and develop in the workplace. This learning took place through observation, shadowing, trial and error, face-to-face communication, self-motivation and by doing. These experiences exemplify the significance of social interaction at work, where learning occurs between professionals as part of their everyday practices and participation in the workplace.

The second concept, social constraints, revealed that the lack of social interaction and communication, and some processes and structures, may inhibit the sharing of professional knowledge and limit the possibilities for workplace learning to happen. Findings also showed that in the 'living experience' of the participants, the nature of workplace learning is mediated by the individual's conception of learning itself. For the researcher and for the participants themselves, workplace learning is easy to overlook; lessons learned often seem to be simply common sense after the event. In this regard, reflection helped the researcher and participants to better explore the phenomenon of learning at work. Overall, HRD professionals most commonly employed reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action for describing their ways of knowing at work, but they also relied on experts or verified their tentative knowledge with multiple sources. The critical influence of organisational culture on workplace learning was constantly stressed in all the interviews.

The banking environment, politics, power and the ways work was organised and managed were never far away during my fieldwork. Nonetheless, those issues were mentioned by participants only incidentally and in general terms. Moreover, it should be recognised that those issues have certainly been identified as relevant to the study of emotions and workplace learning, but because of the breadth of theoretical material, the empirical exploration of emotions and workplace learning themselves, and the different aims and objectives pursued in this thesis it has been impossible to sensibly elucidate those issues in all their complexity. To sum up, this seems to suggest that workplace learning may be viewed as emerging from relations and interactions of people with the social and material elements of the particular context where they perform their work practices (Fenwick, 2010). Thus, context should be considered carefully in terms of its division of labour, power relations, social affordances and constraints, cultural influences, language and so forth (Fenwick, 2010). As this chapter has striven to show, when talking about workplace learning we should draw attention to the relational interdependence between learners (e.g. HRD professionals) and the socio-material environment (e.g. the workplace) where daily work practices are enacted. In the next chapter, the findings specifically related to the interplay between emotions and workplace learning will be illustrated.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Findings III: Experiencing the Interplay between Emotions and Workplace Learning

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings and analysis related to the interplay between emotions and learning at work, in order to answer the third sub-question and the primary research question: how do HRD professionals experience the everyday interplay between their emotions and their workplace learning? Emotions and workplace learning are interpreted here as two complex processes that are vital and interdependent components of all human experience. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of the empirical findings: emotions as, in part, learned experiences; workplace learning as, in part, an emotional experience; the embodied-relational being as the fundamental link between these two experiences.

8.2 Emotions as Learned Experiences

It has been suggested here that emotions are located within the holistic flow of experience, which is consistent with the hermeneutical-pragmatist underpinnings of the research approach of this thesis, stressing the relational dynamics of meaning-making. Moreover, it has been noted that emotions are not only felt as embodied experiences but they are also enacted as ‘emotional display’ in the ongoing flow of everyday communicative performances (Simpson and Marshall, 2010). It is this emotional display, in the form of communicative expression, that is accessible to us as researchers. This section outlines how HRD professionals learned about emotional display at work.

As already seen, emotions depend on our knowledge and understanding, and thus the way individuals construct meaning, experience and display their emotions is considerably influenced by their learning (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001). HRD professionals at ABC Bank learned about emotional display at work in three main ways: 1. from other people; 2. from work experience; 3. from gender rules. The participants described learning about emotional display from other people using methods such as observation, feedback or supervision. Those they learned from included mentors, colleagues and supervisors. Alisa reported having no choice but to learn from observing other male co-workers:

I am one of the youngest HRD professionals here at ABC Bank. I always try to make myself accepted in this workplace environment ... um ... And I guess the best way to get it is to act like a man. (Alisa)

Alisa was reflecting on a critical incident where she was the only one who did not want to dismiss another HRD professional from her post. She described how she stopped herself from crying and how she felt on that occasion:

I wanted to cry but I resisted. I did not cry ... you know ... because I just realised that I should have been more like the men. I should have been more unemotional and cold and rational. (Alisa)

This account shows how the feeling rules which are typical of a principally male-dominated cultural context may influence women's behaviour in the workplace. Alisa learned that she did not want to cry in the workplace from observing another colleague who cried. Her feelings about professional standards in the workplace led to her belief about crying:

I knew to go somewhere else and not cry in front of other colleagues. No one taught me. I assume part of that is ... you see ... I do have a colleague that cries and it seems unprofessional to me. When other people hurt her sensibility, she'll start crying. And I just think I'm not going to do that because I see that as unprofessional.

(Alisa)

Some of the participants also received direct feedback from other co-workers about their emotional display. Rosetta reflected upon an incident which took place early in her career and which was important to her learning about emotional display. A male colleague had let her know that she should work on being less emotional in public. Rosetta asserted that this was a critical early learning experience because she understood she needed to perform like the men and not to express emotions in public she should not. The following example shows both observation and feedback:

It was early in my career that I was trying to learn how to be a good HRD professional. I was trying to understand what was and was not acceptable in my profession. I used to work with a team of colleagues who were largely males, and so rather than being uncomfortable, which I could have been later on in my career, ... you know ... I just learned that I should not show a lot of emotion at work. (Rosetta)

Barbara received direct positive feedback about her emotional display after a meeting where she cried in front of a male co-worker. This account indicates how women may be expected to be more emotional than they are in order to conform to gender role expectations:

I was talking to Roberto and I said 'I'm sorry I got so emotional'. And he reassured me that it was very important that I did that ... because I represented the female side of the profession and organisation. So it's sort of like he wanted me to do that. He then encouraged me to continue to be myself. (Barbara)

Andrea learned about maintaining a neutral expression as a result of feedback from another HRD professional who observed his emotional display during a meeting. This was the meeting where he was criticised by the senior managing director:

I was trying very hard not to shout and was probably making grim faces. After it was all over, another co-worker that worked with me took me aside and told me 'I think that it's only going to hurt if you show this on your face'. From that point on I tried to better manage my emotional expression in the workplace. (Andrea)

Karine illustrated how she allowed her personal problems to show in the workplace by being emotional and the subsequent feedback her supervisor provided about this:

There was a gentleman I worked with. We actually did not work in the same department but he used to be nice to me. I would come into work upset because of something my partner had done the day before. One day that colleague came in and said 'Karine, when you are tired of being treated badly, stand up'. And ... you know ... it took me some time to mull over those words and the more I thought about them the more I realised that I had let people in the workplace to see that I had no character, and that I had allowed personal problems to affect what I was doing. I mean ... when you show all over the place at work ... well ... when you do that the understanding is that you are a weak person and ... and male colleagues may have no respect for you. (Karine)

In each of these stories, participants learned from other people in the workplace, either by observation or by direct feedback. It is worth noting that many critical incidents were with men who provided women with feedback on their emotional performance at work. Many participants also discussed learning about emotional display from work experience. In their accounts, HRD professionals described informal and incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins, 2001) as well as learning by trial and error. Sometimes, their learning about emotional display was influenced by chance too. When answering a question about the acceptability of displaying emotions in his position, Romualdo outlined the importance of a neutral facial expression in order to work and deal with multiple co-workers:

I believe that it's not good for an HRD professional to express emotions in public. But it is also important, in the workplace, to be empathetic towards whomever you're working or dealing with ... I mean ... you have to show an emotional link with people. It's like to bottle everything up. (Romualdo)

There seemed to be an unquestioned expectation that a neutral emotional display was the suitable one while at work, and that it carried a connotation of more professional conduct than did any display of emotions. Romualdo, in fact, explained that neutrality was equivalent to professionalism:

I think people expect a certain professionalism in the workplace, or ... you know ... a kind of neutral emotional expression that denotes the fact that you are professional, and suggests that you're focusing on what you're supposed to be focusing on at work. (Romualdo)

Marco described learning about emotional display as part and parcel of his daily working practice:

Well it's very hard for me to answer your question. I think it's just in the experience of your daily working activities that you learn how to express your emotions.
(Marco)

Marco also reported learning about emotional display by trial and error:

It has really to do with trial and error. It's hard work because you learn from your experience ... and this happens every day. You learn how to behave, what's appropriate, what's expected from you and it's just trial and error through the years ... I mean ... you kind of start finding an emotional balance so as to be accepted by your co-workers, and socialise with them. (Marco)

Rosalina illustrated her difficulty in maintaining her composure during an internal audit and the importance of not losing power by displaying emotions in such a situation:

I would get so agitated ... so anxious ... If you get emotional or if you get anxious, you lose all your ground. I learned there that as a woman that if I was not neutral ... I mean ... apparently unemotional ... that I would not get the respect from other people. (Rosalina)

Morena discussed how as a HRD manager she was required to discipline employees for something they have done, and that sometimes she felt badly for the employee, that is for the person, yet she could not display that because of her need to appear impartial. Morena talked about the difficulty of separating her emotions from her role as a manager and the resulting feeling of inauthenticity she experienced:

My job implies being impartial, neutral, and this can mean to be unsympathetic at times. I'm unable to be myself in terms of feeling empathetic towards colleagues and listening to their problems as much as I would like to be ... I mean ... I feel conflicting emotions because I would like to help but ... but it's my job to enforce

the rules and be impartial ... I guess this conflict upset me as long as people may not see the person I really am. (Morena)

Giulia also discussed authenticity at work as an issue and suggested that the person to whom you are expressing your emotions is important, because the relationship with that person can determine whether or not you should restrain your own emotions. Reflecting on her old boss that wanted to close down her department she said:

You actually have to set aside your basic emotions and think with your head instead ... and realise that you have to be strong in a business situation. It's easier for me to do that in the workplace than it is in my personal life. Because business is business ... you know ... you bear in mind that concept. Like that it is easier for me to be in control rather than let my emotions control me. (Giulia)

These last accounts seem to show how personal relationships are embedded in the specific social setting where they are enacted (e.g. the workplace), a social setting which transmits socio-cultural expectations that may constrain behaviour and personal styles of doing things. These accounts seem also to bring to light the tensions between the rational and the emotional, between the social and the personal which appears to characterise all relationships to a varying degree (Simmel, 1917/1950). Social events in the workplace generate dynamics, like the ones described here, which allow the investigation of relational processes in the spirit of 'relational sociology' (Emirbayer, 1997). The embeddedness of relationships in specific social settings seemed to be confirmed by some participants who related their emotional display to specific circumstances. These circumstances included both the person and the particular event.

The feeling rules, or the appropriateness of emotional display, may consequently change from one person or one situation to another. Pamela recounted how sometimes, in the workplace, she was supposed to act like a woman and sometimes like a man. When answering how she knew which behaviour was appropriate at a given moment, she outlined the importance of assessing the specific person and the specific situation in order to decide how to act:

A lot of it I believe is trying to get to know the people you're working with and then you learn it a little here and there. Once you have had a confrontation ... um ... you know them better and you can imagine how they're going to play it. The more you know them the more you know that guy is a nice person or that guy is a bad person.
(Pamela)

Pietro depicted his informal learning about emotional display as, in part, learning about the workplace culture, and how men may learn differently from women:

I guess you have to learn it by yourself. It's ... a day-to-day thing. You experience different things ... you see ... and kind of learn on a daily basis what is and what is not. I also think that culture is important ... well ... the workplace culture is critical to learn to get around there ... I guess it takes a woman a lot longer to learn the same things that a man may get in just a week. (Pietro)

Another participant, Rachele, described experience, age and trial and error as critical factors in her way of learning about emotional display at work:

Well I assume that experience and age are very important when talking about emotional expression at work ... I mean ... experience comes with age so when you're younger, when you're less experienced I assume you learn things the hard way ... well ... hopefully not all the time. I had to learn a lot of this the hard way, sometimes I succeeded sometimes I failed. That's life ... Experience helps you to gain a broader view of your immediate socio-cultural context. (Rachele)

Rolf learned from his daily working practices how he was supposed to act in a certain fashion because of his role as a HRD professional:

I believe that operations people are the yellers, the screamers, while the HRD professionals are supposed to be calm, rational, a little haven of peace and tranquillity who can arbitrate and do anything and ... you know ... and can turn anything into a win-win situation and nobody leaves with hurt feelings. (Rolf)

In connection with the third sub-theme of this section, some of the participants portrayed their process of learning about emotional display at work as tied to learning about gender rules. In other words, there were rules about emotional display that participants applied specifically to women and other rules they applied to men. Moreover, many of the women who illustrated learning about emotional display as part of gender rules reported having grown up with boys, and the resulting comfort with male colleagues they experienced at work. Gina described having grown up with boys and how that personal experience helped her to interact with male co-workers:

I suppose it is your comfort level with men more than anything ... There was caring at my house but I'd say not a lot of coddling ... you know ... I grew up with three boys and their answer was always in a caring and gentle way. I knew they were always on my side but they also expected me to cry at times ... because I am who I am, quite forthright and I'm not emotional I suppose ... Well I feel like I have strong emotions but ... but I don't spend a lot of time talking about them I think. (Gina)

Gina also added that her early experience of growing up with boys helped her to feel at ease when interacting with male co-workers:

I guess you could refer to me as a tomboy ... growing up as the only female and now I have one son. I learned that you have to be careful what type of emotion you do

show ... My upbringing helped me to better interact with males in the workplace.

(Gina)

At the time of my fieldwork, ABC Bank had not invested in personnel procedures to identify 'appropriate' emotion rules and to train staff in emotional display of those rules. Adherence to emotion rules was expected, but these rules were not codified by ABC Bank and HRD professionals did not receive specific training. Participants seemed to draw on and apply emotional rules internalised through informal socialisation. Despite this, such rules although unstated were as binding on the employees as any delineated in personnel handbooks. Hence participants learned about emotional rules with little guidance, relying on their pre-existing 'background knowledge' of the cultural norms accepted within their community of practice. Most of the participants valued highly the ability to 'understand' co-workers and different situations quickly in order to provide a good standard of personalisation in emotional encounters at work. HRD professionals brought a considerable knowledge of emotion management based on earlier socialisation experiences from home, school and social life: what Bolton and Boyd (2003: 297) depicted as presentational rules or 'the basic socialised self'. In this regard, Paolo observed:

I think that you have some experience of dealing with people and emotional encounters ... you know ... It's often to do with common sense ... I mean ... you have to be nice to people. (Paolo)

This also indicates the importance placed on experience, suggesting that HRD professionals are more likely to observe and listen to more knowledgeable colleagues, or use other informal on-the-job training techniques, rather than to be 'instructed' by some 'ivory tower' coach.

I observed that lunchtime was an important source of informal learning and socialisation, as participants sat together sharing their experiences, telling stories about situations, and how problems were tackled. One participant, Renato, recounted:

I love chatting with colleagues during coffee breaks or lunchtime ... I mean ... It's an interesting way of finding out about people and their experiences ... I guess it is learning about work, feelings, and situations ... And time goes by quickly! (Renato)

Lastly, participants also learned to negotiate between different frameworks of emotional display. When people are in the presence of other people, they may want to be perceived in a certain way and therefore consciously manage their expressive demeanour (Goffman, 1959). This may lead to issues of authenticity of the emotional performance and, in this study, some HRD professionals actually admitted to intentionally showing false emotions. When dealing with unpleasant people, participants often relied on polite words and a fake smile that did not display their true emotions:

I generally give a false smile to some nasty colleagues or clients I have to deal with at times ... you know ... I give them the answer they expect but I do not feel. It's a useful device if you want to survive! (Roberto)

This approach helped participants feel more in control of their emotions in particularly unpleasant social encounters. This section has illustrated how emotions and their display rules may be learned in connection with work, gender and informal socialisation processes and experiences. These findings seem to suggest that HRD professionals are indeed able to negotiate different frameworks of emotional display within their workplace, which supports Bolton's notion of workers as 'skilled emotion managers' (Bolton, 2005).

These HRD professionals, as social actors, also learnt how to manage different situations with the use of the appropriate emotional display, which is congruent with Bolton's typology of emotion management in the workplace as illustrated in the related literature review chapter. The next section is dedicated to the emotional experience of workplace learning.

8.3 Workplace Learning as an Emotional Experience

We are our emotions (Denzin, 1984) and, in this sense, the emotional life “is not simply a part or an aspect of human life ... It is the core and essence of human life” (McMurray, 1962: 75). This ubiquity of emotions in human life makes them an unavoidable part of all workplace learning (Beatty, 2011). Learning may direct and control emotions, but it may be itself shaped by emotions, or even be a product of emotions (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001). This section outlines how participants made sense of their workplace learning as an emotional experience. As noted above, workplace learning is a process through which workers deploy and change their ways of knowing, and it occurs inevitably and continuously through workers' engagement in daily activities and interactions (Billett, 2008). Thus, there is no difference between the process of everyday thinking and acting and the process of learning at work (Billett, 2008). In this study, workplace learning was described by HRD professionals as a deeply emotional process, driven, inhibited and shaped by different emotions, including *fear*, *anger*, *anxiety*, *empathy*, *joy* and *interest*. Learning at work usually arises in situations in which we do not as yet know or are as yet unable to achieve what we intend to do. It thus involves some degree of uncertainty, which may lead to varying levels of fear, anger and anxiety.

This uncertainty reminds us, often awkwardly, that our physical bodies are immersed within the unrelenting linearity of time. *Fear*, at its most basic level, is a mixture of time and imagination. Something we envisage that has yet to happen gives rise to the emotional reaction that we call ‘fear’ (Skinner, 2004). Rosalina recalled her fears when she first joined the HRD Office of ABC Bank:

I came here and I knew almost nothing about the job ... I mean ... I hadn’t worked in a bank before. It was nothing like what I learnt or worked before, and I was terrified to think about the sheer volume of stuff I had to learn at work. (Rosalina)

Indeed, our ability to go on in everyday working life rests on our having some idea of what is about to occur in the near future, and this requires us to partly trust our tomorrow. However, for some participants trusting in their future was quite a difficult task, because of the organisational change that ABC Bank was undergoing at the time of my fieldwork. In this regard, Rachele observed that:

There are some people around here ... you know ... that are scared of change ... they do not like learning new things and they’re not comfortable at work. (Rachele)

Like Rachele, Pietro remarked on his and other participants’ fear about their near future:

Our workplace is littered with uncertainty and ... um ... Are we going to have a job next month? Are we going to work together next year? Uncertainty makes me afraid of my future and this fear ... you know ... interferes with my everyday work and learning. (Pietro)

The fear of change was mostly expressed as pain related to personal change, perceived negative feedback from colleagues, or concerns that related to not being able to fulfil the expectations of other co-workers. This tendency to react to the unfamiliar with fear is very strong and, in a certain sense, is typical of our human nature.

The subject of fear also came up in the context of diversity and, especially, in the context of not letting go of the old way of learning and doing things in the HRD Office of ABC Bank.

I feel that with diversity comes conflict ... you know ... and with conflict comes emotion, because we value what each colleague brings to the table ... um ... but we are setting ourselves up for conflict. We're too afraid to let loose of the old way of thinking you know ... the old way of doing things around here. That's what I call fear of learning at work. (Roberto)

Romualdo also stated that:

In our team, we do not examine the differences long enough to actually disclose them and consequently to deal with those differences and really learn and understand them. (Romualdo)

In general, I observed that feelings of stress or inadequacy, building to fear, led to apprehension towards the whole experience of learning and working during a period of dramatic change at ABC Bank. It seemed that the broader context was driven by fear and competition as well. The above quotations show that there were fears about the consequences of action, and fears of difference among various organisational actors. Thus, the fears experienced by participants in the present study could have inhibited their workplace learning. In spite of those fears, however, learning at work did occur for all participants. In fact, it should be remembered that fear is also a basic and positive mechanism of self-preservation, which is crucial for survival (LeDoux, 1996). *Anger* was another powerful emotion that participants reported as shaping their learning at work. Despite a long tradition of inquiry, anger still remains an ill-defined concept, that is an "I know it when I feel (or see) it" type of emotion (Schieman, 2007: 494).

Broadly speaking, anger is a social and adaptive emotion, often felt towards somebody, designed to activate self-protection at times of perceived injustice or threat. Anger was a cause of mixed feelings about work and learning among participants. For example, Pamela expressed anger and annoyance about the expectations of her professional unit. She told of excessive workload and felt angry about the continual demands others put on her:

I feel angry because of the excessive workload ... I mean ... It riles me to be unjustly treated by managers who do not understand how difficult it is to work and learn new stuff when you're constantly under pressure. (Pamela)

Rosalina spoke of how she experienced anger because of another co-worker's rudeness:

We were a team developing a new training project and we were expected to learn how to make things work. And ... you know ... there was a colleague who persistently came in late ... When he came into the Office everything was disrupted, everything was disturbed. When we were holding a meeting he would talk above it, and he was incredibly loud. His lack of respect for what was going on in the Office caused trouble to the team ... I mean ... learning and working was more difficult for all of us. (Rosalina)

Communication problems also emerged as an issue for some of the participants, especially the lack of good communication and being excluded from meetings and events. Roberto recounted that "the lack of communication irritated me, because it frequently happened that two people were unknowingly trying to do the same job or learn the same stuff and wasting each other's time". Roberto also recognised that:

There's times when I feel very upset, very angry ... I mean ... I think it's probably the feeling of being excluded from social events in the organisation ... That irritates

me ... then I feel less motivated to improve my knowledge or doing stuff around here. (Roberto)

These quotations show how feeling angry affected the work and learning of several participants. Gender played a role in the interpretation of angry displays at work too. This is because social and organisational rules appear to accept the presence of gendered dualities in anger display. Social and organisational rules simultaneously tolerate greater emotional expressiveness among women while also expecting them to be less likely to display anger, and, paradoxically, tolerate emotional restraint among men while also expecting them to be more likely to display anger (Domagalski and Steelman, 2007). One reason postulated for that belief is the fact that women are more concerned than men about the negative consequences that anger may have on their relationships (Gianakos, 2002). In fact, female participants in this study reported being concerned about anger display diminishing the quality of their interpersonal relationships. In this regard, Rosalina claimed that:

I prefer not to show anger at work because I ... you know ... usually trust people and like to have good relationships. When I feel angry or irritated I try to calm down ... I mean ... I concentrate on doing something interesting, and then I focus my attention on my work and strive to learn something new from my emotional experience. (Rosalina)

This last episode indicates that women may be more interpersonally focused than men, and that women's anger may be more likely to result from another's action or be described in relational terms. Nonetheless, it is worth restating that emotional rules are complex as well as socially situated, and that these rules may be at odds in different socio-cultural contexts.

In this study, anger seemed to have positive consequences such as learning how to overcome obstacles (as in the case of Rosalina). At the same time, anger also seemed to divert focus from what was pertinent, limiting attentiveness, and therefore it may have been detrimental to the productive workplace learning of HRD professionals at ABC Bank. *Anxiety* was the most frequently mentioned emotion that participants related to workplace learning. Anxiety is a response to an unclear or ambiguous stimulus, and an evolved defence system that has served to protect people from survival threats (Ohman, 2000). It is unlikely that change and workplace learning will occur without some level of anxiety. The participants in this study were no exception. In the HRD Office of ABC Bank, organisational practices that led to change and work intensification increased HRD professionals' workloads and responsibilities without either giving them real voice to speak about what they thought was important, or adjusting their ongoing job responsibilities. These increased workloads and accountability seemed to augment the level of anxiety implied in change and learning at work. Renato revealed that:

I feel uneasy here ... because I do not receive all the information I need to do my job professionally. The new way of doing things ... um ... the new technological system make me feel anxious about doing my job. This feeling of unease hinders my concentration ... I mean ... it is more difficult to improve your knowledge and stuff ... you know. (Renato)

In Renato's story we can see how anxiety may create feelings of unease and hinder concentration and, consequently, how new knowledge and new learning may be inhibited.

Pamela experienced anxiety and frustration because she felt isolated during a period of increased workload, which prevented her from interjecting the moments of learning that she relied on to refine her professional practice:

I do not feel I have enough guidance here at work ...in terms of what I should or shouldn't do. I've done what I think is appropriate, but ... I'm a bit anxious about the situation. (Pamela)

Pamela also explained that one day when she got out of her car in the parking lot at work she told herself "let the game begin". By saying this she was preparing herself for not knowing how her day would be managed; she learned that it could be quiet, calm or chaotic. Her intention, regardless of how she was going to manage the day, was to deal with the unpredictability and still "come out in a good mood". In other words, Pamela had learned how to deal with the anxiety and unpredictability so that work did not change the image she had of herself as a relaxed, caring and empathic HRD professional and co-worker. Another insight to emerge from the findings was how some participants appeared to recognise the ambiguity in their roles and reported how they tried to cope with this situation of uncertainty and conflict. One participant illustrated how he was unhappy with his new role but he had to put his feelings and emotions aside in order to get on with his job:

I see my role as supporting and supervising colleagues in training and learning at work ... It's about establishing networks ... That's what this role is ... but now there's not much I can do about it. My feelings seem irrelevant. I have just got to get on with the job that I've been given to do at the moment. (Roberto)

In Roberto's account anxiety caused him feelings of unhappiness which contributed to make his work and learning more difficult.

It is possible to infer from these data that participants experienced anxiety as a consequence of uncertainty and lack of guidance in relation to their role and place in professional practice. Some participants reported experiencing bodily sensations and emotional reactions in connection with their tensions and anxiety.

My heart rate increased. I just wanted to run out of the room ... mostly a tense feeling and ... um ... just not wanting to be there. (Barbara)

I identified it as a performance anxiety and that is how I felt I was anxious ... I noticed I was very defensive of my work ... when my boss said anything I was ready to defend my work and give explanations for everything. That is how my anxiety came out. I then learned to be more open about my feeling. (Riccardo)

Over a short period of time, these tensions became distractions that prevented Barbara and Riccardo from focusing on their own work, and the steep learning that was part and parcel of being HRD professionals. Over time, participants also learned to reconcile these tensions and re-establish new, albeit different, professional and personal relationships with their colleagues. They tended to cope with those experiences by talking to colleagues and supervisors.

I had some stressful time at work and needed somebody to talk about it ... Other co-workers knew my feelings because ... you know ... I'm open about them ... It is difficult for me not to show my real identity in public. (Rosetta)

Finally, I observed that most of the participants felt less anxious when they received feedback or saw improvement in their professional skills. Gina, for example, indicated that her ability to take advantage of feedback was the difference in her experience of anxiety at work:

I feel like I can take feedback now ... I'm able now to take the ideas from colleagues and supervisors and integrate them into something that is useful rather than put my guard up. I'm stronger now. (Gina)

It seems that the anxiety related to learning at work, like fear and anger, was experienced by participants as a mix of positive and negative emotional states, and with specific, individual connotations. The management of anxiety then becomes a strategic dimension in learning situations, since it may equally develop or inhibit learning itself and change (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001; Vince, 2002). Although participants experienced fear, anger and anxiety, they also experienced empathy. *Empathy* was expressed in terms of compassion, care and concern for other colleagues. Many of the participants referred to the concept of role taking in their descriptions of empathy. Some did it in a very clear and explicit way, using expressions such as ‘seeing through another’s eyes’, but most of them without explicitly using the term ‘role taking’ or any similar one. Paolo depicted the understanding that he experienced from the co-workers who were close to him as their ability to take his perspective: “because they are close to me and know me well, they can see through my eyes”. He stressed the role of knowledge in their ability to do so: “they understand ... you know ... by knowing the way in which I think, my temperament, and the context of what is happening”. Paolo also referred to the way he experienced empathy and understanding from some colleagues close to him, by stressing emotional closeness:

I believe that trust, acceptance and openness are the most powerful elements of any interaction ... I mean ... I believe that colleagues whom I can share my thoughts with and they with me are the people with whom I have the strongest relations.
(Paolo)

In a similar way, Alisa combined the affective and cognitive features of empathy when describing her experience of being understood:

Some colleagues can kind of feel me because of their closeness to me, and the length of our relationship ... I mean ... By knowing the way in which I think, they are involved even if it doesn't concern them directly. Because they are close to me and know me well, they can understand me. (Alisa)

These quotations, coupled with my field observation, reinforced the idea that an 'empathic field' was created among most HRD professionals at ABC Bank. This emotional complicity helped participants to sustain, to a certain degree, a climate of 'learning-within-relationship' (Short and Yorks, 2002). Participants often engaged in the workplace learning process with a sense of mutuality, making sense of the felt experiential knowing of other co-workers. In this regard, Rolf explained that:

People actually feel an emotional connection with others. I think a sympathetic attitude is important. They do not come into work and do these long hours for nothing ... they care about training ... they care about learning and about other colleagues. (Rolf)

Andrea spoke about a female co-worker who not only had an empathic attitude, but coupled this with commitment to people and the organisation:

I believed every aspect of what she did reflected her whole persona ... and what she felt was her commitment to training and learning, as well as her commitment to people ... um ... to the organisation ... so you knew who she was. (Andrea)

This empathic interaction reinforced participants' sense of self too, and was central to communication and the development of relationships among them. Karine, for instance, revealed that:

I love this job and just knowing that colleagues care for me makes a tremendous difference for me ... I feel like I can be myself here ... I'm not afraid to speak up, and if I have a problem, a lot of people will listen and empathise. (Karine)

Karine made sense of this experience as a learning one, being able to better carry on with her own life and work. The creation of trusting relationships led to improved learning and better behaviour as well:

Because I feel we're learning all the time really. Sometimes a co-worker may throw light onto something and you think 'Well, I've never realised that' ... Which helps you develop your professional skills and learning really. (Karine)

The majority of participants seemed to understand that helping one is equivalent to helping all. They seemed to realise that they needed to feel good in order to open up and learn at work. Several participants also described aspects of their work life in terms of enthusiasm and joy. *Joy* was defined as an intensely positive and vivid emotion that participants related to the work itself, relationships, the self and the work environment. Thus, joy appeared to influence workplace learning indirectly, because, as noted above, there is no difference between the process of acting and the process of learning at work (Billett, 2008). Riccardo associated joy and enthusiasm for work with commitment to training and learning, and to the organisation. Riccardo also noted that joy had the potential of making the workplace a more pleasant and engaging environment. Other participants spoke of colleagues who expressed their real passion for work and engagement. Rolf explained that:

I think you can recognise commitment and joy in people ... I mean ... their networking, the degree of knowledge they've accumulated and their passion for work. (Rolf)

Alisa remarked that:

I desire to do the best I can with my own training and learning, and with other colleagues that I work with. Things that I'm assigned to I always try to do the best I can. I have fun too! (Alisa)

It can be argued that, if work and learning provide enjoyment, then workers will be motivated to continue with those activities which give them such enjoyment.

Talking about co-workers and relationships Gina reported that:

I enjoy the discussions in our team. It's open communication ... you know ... You may get new knowledge and it's fun. We understand and help each other. (Gina)

I was able to observe some expressions of enjoyment during my fieldwork, especially in women. Some talked about the experiential component of joy, such as “having a light and happy heart”, whereas other participants referred to the psychological component, such as “inside I feel warm and excited”, which are both features connected with the theme of the ‘self’. Enjoyable work and learning were often identified by participants as ‘fun’, as intrinsically motivating activities that provided a state of being that was an end in itself. Such experiences seemed to have generated a sense of well-being among participants, and may have stimulated a desire to engage in learning activities, because, when immersed in enjoyable experiences, people tend to act with a deep but effortless involvement that may remove from focal awareness the worries and frustration of everyday working life. When asked if the organisational environment played a role in the improvement of their sense of enjoyment at work, most of the participants replied that ABC Bank did not have an active role in the matter. Nonetheless, HRD professionals experienced a sense of joy through their work, relationships and learning, despite turmoil and challenges in the organisational environment.

There is a role connection between learning and happiness ... to be happy one must grow (learn) and enjoying learning makes one happy. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992: 177)

This connection between learning and enjoyment may well have beneficial application in today's organisations that are attempting to create a more positive work environment. *Interest* was the second most mentioned emotional state that participants related to workplace learning. Interest and curiosity will be used as synonyms here because they both refer to a motivational-emotional condition associated with exploration and learning. Curiosity is an intellectual need that stimulates our desire to know. Renato, when talking about his work, disclosed that it was "intriguing" and that he had "always wanted to know about human resources and training". His interest in these subjects, then, stimulated an intellectual desire to know, to learn something new. Renato explained that:

I find that learning new stuff is an intriguing activity. I read a lot about human resources and training. I find it stimulating ... I mean ... It all interests me. (Renato)

Barbara also observed that her interest in new and unusual topics affected positively her training sessions and learning at work.

It helps to have a specific and peculiar topic that interests you. It's exciting to find information that is thought-provoking ... you know ... hard work that doesn't appear like hard work is easier. (Barbara)

Curiosity and interest helped participants to work better and to learn which, in turn, enabled change and things to be more appealing. When interested, HRD professionals persisted longer at learning tasks, spent more time working and gained more satisfaction from their activities. Broadly speaking, it seems that without some curiosity and motivation there would be no learning. In this study, controlling curiosity and interest was, among some participants, an important skill too. Morena believed, in this regard, that self-discipline was necessary:

I'm interested in many topics, but I have to kind of neglect some information because ... you know ... one can get lost ... by the sheer quantity of information you can obtain nowadays ... I then select what I find interesting ... I mean ... it is a disciplined approach to learning at work. (Morena)

Another participant needed to be controlled when exploring a brand new task at work:

I had to deal with a new topic and I was sort of grinning from ear to ear ... It seems odd to say but I felt like I was having too much fun. I had to stop indulging myself so much. I had to get back to reality. (Karine)

Curiosity also seemed to motivate participants to investigate the world and challenge themselves and, in some cases, to be relevant to obtaining personal fulfilment. Upon seeking new and challenging activities, participants with greater curiosity expanded their knowledge, skills and sense of self. Morena, for instance, reported that:

I love challenges. When I'm interested in a topic I do my best ... I mean ... I invest a lot of effort in the task and then I feel like I'm a changed person. I love it. It may be a good reason to get on in life. (Morena)

As in the case of Morena, interest and curiosity appeared to have value over and above the process of inquiry and the knowledge gained. Sometimes, the emotional state of interest was hindered by the need to complete a difficult task in order to meet a deadline, as in the following story:

I got so distracted by everything that was interesting that I wasn't able to organise well enough ... I reached halfway the work and realised that it was impossible for me to spend more time on those things ... so I kind of had to change my mind. I really did find myself limited by the deadline ... you know. (Pietro)

To sum up, curiosity and interest motivated many participants to act and think in new ways, and learn about whatever was the actual target of their attention. There is an epistemic value we can attach to curiosity and interest (Schmitt and Lahroodi, 2008) and, in this sense, there would be no search for meaning, no exploration of the self and world without the experience of interest.

8.4 The Embodied-Relational Being: Linking Emotions and WPL

The goal of this section is to underline the importance of the ‘embodied-relational being’ (hereinafter also called ‘the self’) as the vital link between emotions and workplace learning. All workplace learning relies on the emotional journey of organisational actors.

Learning informs individuals of the ways they relate to others, allowing them to empathise and understand their emotions and enables them to take appropriate actions in pursuit of their aims ... Learning in the context of emotion implies a change in position, a reconstruction of one’s way of perceiving and thinking (Kelly, 1955). (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001: 442)

HRD professionals at ABC Bank were no exception. They experienced the continual interplay between emotions and workplace learning as part and parcel of the emergent and negotiated journey of their selves. Participants’ accounts were the accounts of social selves, because they reflected the relational understanding that developed through the social interactions they experienced at work. Many of the participants seemed to interpret their work as a journey to identify, discover, create and struggle with an inner core that they thought of as ‘the self’. Most of them appeared to perceive this core self not as fixed and stable, but as an ongoing and negotiated achievement.

A predominant pattern that emerged from this study was the participants' search for personal meaning and struggle to construct self through their work. Despite describing their interests and life outside of work, many of the participants stressed the great importance of their working lives to their sense of self. Common to all HRD professionals was a strong aspiration to exercise their sense of self in the workplace. Work, identified by participants as a worthwhile activity justifying their investment of time and intellectual, emotional and physical energy, had the developmental power of fulfilling that aspiration. The main theme which seemed to be particularly significant in the participants' exploration of the self was the relational interdependence between social and individual agency (Billett, 2008). HRD professionals actively exercised their individual agency in order to construct their sense of self. At the same time, they confronted the power of social agency in the form of organisation structures and organisation cultures. Both processes were interwoven. Many of the participants negotiated and perceived the strength of their selves by watching themselves perform in the workplace. Paolo discovered a self that he portrayed as "a very empathetic person" with real capacity to understand people. Rolf learned that he had a certain personal magnetism that often surprised him. Colleagues told him he was powerful and attractive, but he had a hard time learning this. Some participants said they also learned about the energy of their own creativity, often through its disclosure in the workplace that could surprise and gratify them. Barbara found her creativity through its actual release in her work:

I discovered that creating a brand new online training course had ... you know ... the power to stimulate my own learning ... I had a new life and sense of joy in me.

(Barbara)

HRD professionals often came to know their strength to achieve things through its release in meeting a challenge. Pietro used the term “I can” to show how he was able to turn a difficult problem he faced at work into a solution. As the participants came to feel their strength, they gained confidence in their skills and learned to trust themselves.

Morena mentioned the personal confidence she acquired through working in supervisory roles of increasing responsibility for ABC Bank. She remarked that:

I used to be timid but I’ve moved beyond that. I’ve acquired confidence in my ability to set priorities, achieve goals, and direct other people. I’ve realised I can perform well as a HRD manager. (Morena)

As many participants became more reliant on the strength of their self, they learned to trust their inner feelings. Karine was confident in saying that: “I cannot exactly define what it is I yearn for, but I know it when I feel it”. Some HRD professionals also learned through conflicting relationships and work challenges that their inner feelings and intuitive knowledge could sense beyond communication’s limits what other colleagues meant and needed. Romualdo understood through his work as teamwork facilitator that he could trust his intuitive “reading” of his colleagues as being generally reliable, by “just knowing” when they had no doubt, or when they were in disagreement with him over some specific course of action. However, the participants in this study often found themselves struggling with organisational structures and organisational cultures which they felt constrained their freedom to act or put at risk their sense of self. The critical influence of structures and cultures on emotions and workplace learning was constantly underlined in all the interviews. The banking environment, politics, power, industrial relations and the transformation of work requirements were never far away in our discussions.

Roberto had definite ideas on this, describing a staff development course he had led in the following terms:

It was a five-day course that we put together for our first line managers. It was about initiating change in the workplace under the heading of constant improvement. It was followed by a workplace project. Those who had been involved provided some ... you know ... feedback to the top managers about what they've done, felt and learned. It had a strong experiential base which promoted cooperative participation among all staff and encouraged open-mindedness to experiment and innovation ... I mean ... it promoted continual learning. (Roberto)

In Roberto's example, connections are made between the organisation's formal training course and the informal learning from participation in workplace projects. His example is of a group of people who are reasonably unified in their approach, and who shares goals and objectives. At least this was the image he wanted to convey, and which ABC Bank seemed to advocate. A point of interest is Roberto's ready incorporation of organisation culture into personal discourses. In the literature, this has been referred to as the "corporate colonisation of the self" (Casey, 1995: 138). However, Roberto acknowledged his personal contribution to the push for a desired organisation culture, and Rosetta opened a sensitive topic she related to the clash between her personal values and those advocated by ABC Bank:

Right from the time you start your journey at ABC Bank there is a set of values which you must comply with. This may be in conflict with your personal feelings and values ... you see ... This occurred some time ago when we were going to develop a training session where I didn't like the type of learning which was required for the participants ... I mean ... I didn't like it, but it was imposed and I let the whole project team know my feelings. I was angry but I was able to channel my

emotions in a positive way. I took action about a project that clashed with my values, and received some feedback from management. I think it was a formative experience.

(Rosetta)

Some participants also reported the problem of speaking out. For instance, Riccardo said:

I try to control myself at work ... I mean ... I use to have a lot to say, but you may get into trouble that way. My colleagues tell me that I ask too many questions. I have learned to think before speaking out ... you know ... it is safer because you can't get into trouble if you don't say a word! (Riccardo)

Riccardo learned that his natural inclination to speak out was often an unwelcome and discouraged feature of his personality. The lines of demarcation between acceptable participatory practices of speaking up and undesirable participatory practices of speaking out were normally left unspoken and assumed to be tacitly understood by participants. However, when the boundaries were crossed, as in the case of Riccardo, participants were reproached for asking too many questions and warned against being troublemakers. Another important theme was the role that job demotion and productivity played in constraining the sense of self among participants. They seemed to seek sufficient challenge and freedom in their work without getting caught in the pursuit of pure and simple 'productivity'. Tentative findings suggest that HRD professionals internalised enough of the organisational culture to train other people, even though the development of an 'organisational self' was never complete. Participants were generally strong, confident, risk-takers by nature, and tended to ask 'why' frequently, to seek challenge and ways to express themselves.

Even those who were more compliant with the organisation culture perceived themselves as too self-determined to be colonised by the workplace. Thus, when participants found themselves struggling against oppressive disciplinary work structures that threatened their development, they tried first to make sense of what was happening, then to gain some space for their self to live unharmed. Gina was removed from the facilitator's job that she enjoyed and put back to a 'desk job' with no responsibility or people-contact. She said: "They don't know that I'm a sensitive and caring person ... I feel anxious and I'm obsessed by this situation. I need to keep learning new stuff all the time". Marco told of being transferred from an exciting position managing a small team project back into an administrative paper-work. He felt angry because he realised that his destiny was controlled by ABC Bank, as well as his sense of self put at risk by some meaningless tasks. The sense of stress and despair displayed by these participants as part of their experience of job demotion seems to show how the close relationship between work and self can be powerful. If job demotion is at one end of a continuum, excessive standards of productivity might be situated at the other. Requirements that continually outstrip a person's ability and belittle the sense of self are not always imposed from external sources. Many of the participants appeared to have internalised high-performance ideals from their work, which some of them realised to be unrealistic and harmful to their health. Perfectionist goals often trapped their sense of self in a stressful double-bind situation. Renato admitted: "I now hate the words productivity and perfectionist". To aspire to excellence, he set standards for his work which he realised to be impossible to meet. So his self was always on the run, ceaselessly in deficit, persistently seeking improvement.

Expectations for the self changed as the participants became more competent in a specific work activity, and in managing their evolving career prospects. Rachele allowed herself a learning window when she was given new roles. She allowed herself to go slow, set boundaries and accepted feedback. Andrea, like many other HRD professionals in this study, valued what he called “balance”, but he had to strive for it: “I like challenging situations at work because I know I can do this or that. At the same time I feel I’m getting into a perennial fight ... I mean ... one must find a way to get a balance”. For Giulia, the balance was between the process of learning at work and the personal development she was able to achieve throughout her work career. There seemed to be a tacit assumption by several participants, apparent from many of their stories about emotions, learning and self-knowing, that energising them was an inner core they felt as a ‘real self’. Most participants struggled to seek their sense of self in the workplace, to understand the relation and conflict between the self-at-work and their multiple other selves. During this search they listened to what they called ‘inner voice’, which helped them to uncover their powerful, evanescent, contradictory and seductive self. Alisa talked about learning to listen to herself in order to concretise her “inner resources” and to bring her barriers “into a character”. She spent time doing what she named “inner work”: living a reflective and empathetic life, attempting to understand how to improve herself as a person. Pamela referred to “the process of continual discovery of a self in transition”. Rosalina said: “I feel that my sense of self is in a constant flux ... well ... a sort of becoming. It is enmeshed with my body, work, feelings and knowledge ... It involves me as a whole person”. Rosalina also added: “I’m in a transition ... I’m at a crossroads [where] I feel I should get grounded again”.

She felt an ‘inner need’ to move away from pressure, deadlines and the constraints of the ‘external’ world, like the workplace world. She expected sacrifices but did not know exactly what she would have to give up in order to move into some new space. She was anxious, uncertain, confident. All she had to follow was her ‘inner voice’. This progressive awareness of the need to move out from under organisation structures was alarming for some of the participants. Rachele experienced occasional “hard times and loneliness”. She felt a sense of frustration trying to make sense of time and work, and self-doubt. Morena, however, seemed more certain in her direction, more confident about the importance of her coming-to-know self by moving onward in her profession. She was not looking at any external change, she was focusing much more on understanding her self through her work, her feelings and her relationship with other co-workers. As these participants talked about an unpredictable future and uncertainty, they felt the need to stabilise their selves in the shifting world they were living in. Karine said: “I need challenge and change at the same time but I also want some routine ... I mean ... I need a core of stability”. This core was often found within the agentic and relational self, that is HRD professionals negotiated and made sense of their selves within the encounters and the socially-derived constraints of their workplace. Sometimes the workplace community itself offered a provisional mooring of stability. HRD professionals who recalled the enjoyment of participating in creative projects, or the warmth of friendship in a work team characterised by trust, also talked about feeling a sense of stability. Their self was corroborated by the team as worthwhile and the anchor was purpose. A workplace project often provided a clear sense of purpose. Immersion in such projects tied their work to an anchor that often gave these participants a sense of stability.

The last theme that emerged from findings related to the ‘self’ was ‘spirituality’. Some participants talked directly about the importance of their spirituality in the workplace, especially in their process of coming-to-know, and of becoming. Others indirectly referred to their work in spiritual terms: looking for something bigger and deeper than the self at work, sensing an ineffable energy flowing through themselves and other people, accepting the existence of some unexplainable events which made sense in the realm of mystery. The paradox of the theme of spirituality that emerged from this study was that the workplace tended to reduce mystery in order to increase control, focusing on the tangible and measurable and excluding any reference to the intangible and not-measurable. Yet these HRD professionals reported to me that they naturally integrated their spiritual selves into their work-self, and they also cultivated their spiritual search for meaning in their workplace activities. Pietro said that spirituality was not something he would talk about openly in the workplace, because such conversation “may make some people uneasy”, such as some colleagues. But he believed that his most important type of learning at work, such as how to listen and try to care for co-workers, came from the development of his “spiritual side”. Andrea’s sense of work was based on his spiritual belief of letting go of the past, dissolving the defensive walls protecting self from other people, feeling empathy for other people and becoming vulnerable to their spirits. He believed in relationships, which was the driving force in his effort to build community with other co-workers at ABC Bank. Like Pietro, Andrea strove to learn better how to genuinely make space to listen to other people. Gina mentioned the limits of language to express the mystery of power she found her work and life could generate. She explained: “My boss tells me to just call it ‘synergy’ if I want to be understood”.

She was passionate about human relationships and, in her work as a learning facilitator, she taught colleagues about “deep learning”, making the most of universal interconnection and understanding. Alisa said she felt “compelled” to do many of the things she used to be scared of:

I have a sense of being called ... compelled ... I want to be prepared for a task and I keep telling myself ‘be still and listen’. I sort of feel my whole body ... my whole person as progressing towards more full relationships with other people. (Alisa)

The common thread in participants’ accounts related to their spirituality in the workplace was its development as an ethic of community building and an engagement of self with a purpose beyond the self’s aspirations. HRD professionals who referred to spirituality in their workplace learning felt that their work and their emotions stood for something, contributed something more meaningful. They seemed to sense some sort of inner agency and feelings affecting their workplace learning. They appeared to be focused on a general sense of commitment to whatever they felt to be their life-purpose, an aspiration to display their capabilities in ways that helped and made some meaningful contribution to other human beings. The dimension of spirituality may help us to transcend the postmodern understanding of the ‘fragmented self’, and the enduring dichotomy between individual agency and social structures, through consideration of a more relational basis for theorising about the process of workplace learning and the role of emotions and the self in that process.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has striven to show how emotions and learning are intertwined in human transactions in the workplace, and how the embodied-relational-being may be seen as the vital link between those two phenomena. This chapter has also indicated how the way participants constructed meaning and experienced their emotions at work was influenced by their workplace learning. Participants interpreted their workplace learning as an emotional experience and they seemed to be able to choose which emotions to employ as they learned the consequences of the display of different emotions. Participants' accounts suggest that they had to resolve some kind of emotional conflict (More, 1974) before their workplace learning could take place. Participants' experience of workplace learning was then a deeply emotional process, sustained, inhibited and fashioned by different emotions, including fear and anger, anxiety and empathy, joy and interest, mixed together in relatively long-lasting clusters. Moreover, the continuous and interlocking flux of emotions and workplace learning across the social activities of the participants has been emphasised. This flux has been closely associated with the struggle for the self and spirituality as experienced by HRD professionals at ABC Bank. A number of implications of these findings can be identified in relation to the interplay between emotions and workplace learning, practice and further research. These are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to explore the connection between emotions and workplace learning, and their role in the fashioning of HRD professionals' sensemaking and sense of becoming. As stressed throughout this study, this connection has remained quite underdeveloped in academic literature, despite the sheer volume of existing theory about emotions and workplace learning studied as separate phenomena. Indeed, only a limited amount of research has tried to link these two phenomena, regardless of the great importance they have as powerful sources of meaning and direction in our attempts to understand reality.

This thesis has argued that emotions and learning are interconnected and essential elements of our being-in-the-world. Since there is limited empirical research on this issue, this study has aimed to contribute in that respect to the field of (emotional) workplace learning. The thesis asked: How do HRD professionals experience the everyday interplay between their emotions and their workplace learning? The underlying rationale for this research question is that emotions and learning are two dynamic forces in continuous and complex interplay. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapters, this connection seems to be fundamental to the ongoing human process of *becoming*.

By taking a relational view of emotions and learning at work, this study has emphasised *flux* and *change* as actively worked upon in the daily relationship between individuals' existence and the social world. This research has presented the discursive multiple aspects of emotions and learning at work, suggesting that mixed emotions and mixed learning outcomes can coexist in the workplace. The relational framework developed here has helped to provide a vocabulary to assist in the theoretical and empirical description of how the processes of emotions and learning co-evolved in the living experiences of HRD professionals at work. This chapter offers an overall conclusion to the thesis by summarising how the key findings of this study have aided in answering the main research question. Next the contribution of this thesis will be reiterated, to be followed by some of its implications for future investigation on the subject, and by some general reflections on my research journey.

9.2 Key Findings

Many themes about emotions and learning at work have been drawn from the narratives provided by the HRD professionals who participated in this study. These themes pointed to the everyday negotiations of workers in today's workplace, which are often fraught with conflicting demands and meanings. Two overarching *meta-themes* emerged from findings: 1. emotions and workplace learning as contextual and interdependent phenomena; 2. emotions and workplace learning as relational phenomena.

Emotions and Workplace Learning as Contextual and Interdependent Phenomena

A key finding common to all participants was that their emotional and workplace learning experiences occurred in context. Both phenomena were embedded in specific situations and in the context of their practice. The interplay between such complex, socially fashioned and experienced phenomena occurred best in their social and professional interactions in the workplace. Working as HRD professionals provided opportunities to practise emotions and learning with a wide variety of people and in different situations, which favoured the development of the professional and relational ability of those professionals. All of them reported emotional and learning experiences as occurring inherently in the context of their daily work activities, for example, by interacting with co-workers.

In other words, working as HRD professionals provided opportunities, both incidental and self-directed, that stimulated participants' professional and relational ability. This represents situated knowledge where emotions and learning are best understood in the relational context in which the knowledge is to be used, in this case the workplace. Thus, emotions and workplace learning may be viewed as cultural tools that are shaped in the flux of social interaction, and that can be developed through use in the appropriate culture and community and by adapting to that community's beliefs and values around the use of the cultural tools. In that regard, this thesis has shown how emotions and workplace learning are intertwined in human transactions.

While emotions were interpreted as, in part, learned experiences, at the same time, workplace learning was partly interpreted as an emotional experience. Participants' accounts suggested that emotions were interpreted as a process of learning to adapt to the emergence of their daily situations in the workplace. The findings indicated that participants felt emotions as embodied experiences and enacted them as emotional display in the ongoing flow of everyday communicative practices. It was this emotional display, in the form of communicative expression, that was accessible to research. These findings also illustrated that participants' construction of meaning, experience and display of their emotions was considerably influenced by their workplace learning.

HRD professionals at ABC Bank learned about emotions at work from observation, feedback, supervision, work experience and gender rules. The feeling rules of that specific workplace were experienced in different ways by different participants in different situations. The specific socio-cultural setting where emotions were learned and enacted simultaneously constrained and allowed their experience and display, bringing to light the tensions between the rational and the emotional among participants. Yet, HRD professionals had the capacity to work with alternative interpretations from those proposed or imposed by their socio-cultural setting. They were able, for instance, to manipulate their emotional display in order to gain power in social interactions, as these findings have tried to show.

The findings have also suggested that HRD professionals were indeed able to negotiate their search for the 'self' at work in ways that involved both the 'heart' and the 'mind' and, therefore, Bolton's notion of workers as 'skilled emotion managers' (Bolton, 2005) has been supported. The complexities of today's workplace have resulted in an increasing necessity for HRD professionals to try and manage their emotions in the achievement of their work. Becoming a HRD professional included learning to 'feel' in ways that were situated by localised views of 'emotions' and their relationship to 'reason'. Participants acted in ways they judged to be socially appropriate according to the different types of feeling rules that their workplace context enabled or constrained them to learn.

Each of the six emotion experiences reported in the findings as illustrative examples also had particular implications for workplace learning. To the extent that learning entails change, it is difficult to think of workplace learning without 'anxiety' (Simpson and Marshall, 2010). From a hermeneutical-pragmatist perspective, learning is a process of inquiry into an uncertain situation which is open for investigation, in the sense that its constituting elements are at first disconnected and the outcomes are not known in advance. The resulting experience of uncertainty is what participants in this study have taken anxiety to be. Indeed, our ability to go on in everyday working life rests on our having some idea of what is about to occur in the near future, and this requires us to partly trust our tomorrow.

In this respect the emotion of fear led, among some participants, to apprehension towards the whole experience of learning and working during a period of dramatic change in their workplace. Thus, fear could have inhibited participants' experience of learning at work. By contrast, empathy and joy were reported as powerful, personally validating experiences that helped participants to draw more deeply into the relationality of their situations in the workplace. An 'empathic field' was created among participants which sustained, to a certain degree, a climate of 'learning-within-relationship' (Short and Yorks, 2002), that reinforced participants' sense of self and was central to communication and the development of relationships among them.

Anger signalled the need for self-protection at times of perceived injustice or threat in the workplace. This caused mixed feelings about work and learning among HRD professionals, demanding intense and often difficult learning. For some participants, anger seemed to have positive consequences such as learning how to overcome obstacles. For other participants, anger seemed to divert focus from what was pertinent, limiting attentiveness, and therefore it may have been detrimental to their workplace learning. Ultimately, interest stimulated participants' desire to know. Curiosity and interest helped them to work better and to learn which, in turn, enabled change and things to be more appealing. There is an epistemic value we can attach to curiosity and interest (Schmitt and Lahroodi, 2008), and there would be no search for meaning, no exploration of self and the world without the experience of interest. This thesis has striven to show how that epistemic value applied to these participants too.

Emotions and Workplace Learning as Relational Phenomena

Another key finding common to all participants was that their emotional and workplace learning accounts reflected their relational practices which were part and parcel of their everyday social interactions in the workplace. The focus was therefore on relational practice or, in pragmatist terms, on ‘transaction’, “by means of which becoming emerges” (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011: 69). The components of the transaction, such as selves and situations, are subject to change themselves (Bernstein, 1967), and “may be seen as mutually constituting aspects of an integrated unity” (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011: 70). Thus, relational practices may be understood as the constantly emergent “weaving together of social selves and social situations” (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011: 70).

In this study, participants seemed to understand their experience of the interplay between emotions and learning at work in terms of relational engagement with their socio-cultural context, such as the workplace. This relational engagement was negotiated by participants in the dynamics and unfolding process of their daily working lives. As noted above, the embodied-relational-being was considered to be the vital link between emotions and workplace learning. Participants experienced emotions and learning as embodied human beings within the specific power relations of their immediate social world such as the workplace. They performed actions through their body as a natural self, through bodily habits which inclined them towards certain habitual patterns of action (Bourdieu, 1977).

Many of those habits, though by no means all, were learned by participants through processes of socialisation into their community of practice at work. Those habits were not fixed but, in many cases, disposed participants to styles of response, meaning that such responses were not wholly dependent on the people they were related to in the context of social transaction in the spur of the moment. This is why one person may respond to the same social transaction in a completely different way to another, despite the fact they may have been raised in the same cultural environment (Burkitt, 2008). The empirical data suggested that participants' identities were emergent, that is, they were not fixed entities but continually adjusting to their life-world.

In particular, participants' sense of self seemed to be shaped by the organisational change they were experiencing at the time of my fieldwork. In the context of this shifting background, HRD professionals were able to show significant ways in which their meaning perspectives had developed over time, in nuances of identity, emotional dynamics, learning, attitudes to the organisation and colleagues and work practices. These changes appeared to have happened subtly over time. When immersed in the details of daily living it may be difficult to see outside the shell of self as the main node. Subsequent reflection from a more distant vantage point provided by time functioned for many participants as deep inner examination, to recognise and make sense of their unfolding self, acknowledge the differences between the self now and then, and to assert the changes as positive growth. The empirical data indicated that many participants focused their workplace learning on how to build a network of relationships to form a community.

Participants also learned whom not to trust, whose knowledge or emotional state was not worthy of attending to or learning from, who was dangerous for them. Discerning how exactly to position oneself was often a private struggle, and its conclusion may sometimes have been hidden under rituals of social interactions that preserved an appearance of harmony. Above any other knowledge, most participants in this study seemed to value their movement towards a deeper, more integrative and inclusive interpretation of self. Some likened this movement to a natural progression from learning the competencies needed to survive, to broadening their emotional experience and extending their scope, to integrating their self.

Paradoxically, the search for self was not a lonely task. In their search for self in the workplace, many HRD professionals switched between self-dialogue and interpersonal exchange, “because we exist as an ‘I-for-myself’, an ‘I-for-others’, and there are ‘others-for-me’ in the world” (Burkitt, 2008: 65). In this regard, participants’ emotions and learning were both enabled and constrained by the socio-cultural resources available to them in the workplace. Finally, this search for self seemed to be the product of the dialogic relation among these three moments (‘I-for-myself’, ‘I-for-others’ and ‘others-for-me’), whereby, in their human transactions, participants gave form to others as well as others gave form to them (Bakhtin, 1993). In life, then, there are always moments of passivity and activity in the constitution of the embodied-relational being, for “we are always selves-in-relation-to-others” (Cunliffe, 2008: 129).

9.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis has used a relational view, derived from hermeneutical pragmatism, as a framework for understanding the interplay between emotions and learning in human transactions at work. These conclusions are not to be seen as the final answer, but rather as the beginning of a conceptualisation of emotions and workplace learning that moves the discussion beyond the current interpretation in organisation studies. Such a conceptualisation does not treat emotions and learning as ‘objects’ that are separate from organisational practice. Rather it suggests that they are intrinsic to it. It also moves the thinking away from a somewhat restricted view of these two phenomena in the organisational literature, which often limits them to the logical-rational experience and suggests looking more widely at both of them from an empirical and pragmatic perspective.

The relational view adopted here seeks to understand organisational practice as the ongoing and emergent interdependence between social selves and social situations (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011). It has been indicated, then, that the focus should be on the ‘transactional’ nature of real-time situations that may be seen as the essence of our living and lived experience (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011). Moreover, the relational view has helped to stress the temporal connection of the present as both anchored in the past and pushing into the future. In this research, the emergence of the embodied-relational being over time has been recognised as the vital link between emotions and workplace learning, in the ongoing project of participants’ ‘becoming’.

It is this relational understanding that this thesis has considered to be a valuable contribution to knowledge about the interdependent experience of emotions and workplace learning. This study has also suggested that these two phenomena are embodied in the whole self, and embedded in the specific context of the real-time situation, its environment, its agenda, its actors and their relations, its location and dynamics. Whatever participants needed to know at a given moment to perform emotions or solve a problem, they learned: this included all the professional, technical, socio-relational, cultural and personal knowledge required by the specific context of the real-time situation. After that experience they saw themselves as moving on to new understanding, in the continuous flow of their working life.

Therefore, this study has used the relational framework to explore an underdeveloped topic: while emotions and workplace learning have been studied as separate phenomena, their interplay has been largely ignored in the academic literature. Thus, this thesis has addressed remarks like Beatty's (2011: 346) that seeing "[workplace learning] through an emotional lens allows a better view of the learner in context and offers an improved way forward". On these grounds this study has offered a valuable contribution to the academic literature related to the interplay between emotions and workplace learning, with insights on how these phenomena can be mobilised in the HRD professionals' project of the self. The following section illustrates some of the implications of this study and provides some cues for future research on the subject.

9.4 Implications and Future Research

There are some inevitable implications of this research which influence the conclusions drawn so far and the answers to the research questions. By taking a relational view, this thesis has provided some new insights into the interplay between emotions and workplace learning. Still, it is recognised that they are not exhaustive or generalisable findings, for the main reason that they are drawn from a single case study in a specific banking sector. Connections have to be constructed by readers and applicability of findings tested out in their particular contexts. As Eisner notes:

... problems in the social sciences are more complex than putting the pieces of a puzzle together to create a single, unified picture. Given the diversity of methods, concepts, and theories, it's more a matter of seeing what works, what appears right for particular settings, and creating different perspectives from which the situation can be constructed. (Eisner, 1998: 211)

Instead of generalisability, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) indicate transferability of the research findings to other settings as an important indicator. The similarities in participants' emotional and learning journeys and the commonly recurring episodes that promoted the interplay between those two phenomena in this study seem to suggest that these findings may be transferred to a broader population of HRD professionals. However, this is a task for readers to determine; the aim of this thesis was to describe the context of fieldwork sufficiently such that readers can judge for themselves the applicability of the findings to their own context.

Nonetheless, two implications are worth noting. First, the embodied-relational being as defined in this study appears to be a worthwhile dimension for further research. This dimension directs understanding of emotions and workplace learning more to epistemological concepts of personal search, ways of engaging, processes of meaning-making and moral-ethical aspects of purpose as these influence ways of knowing in practice. We need to look at purpose, and examine how and when the real goals of learning and emotions emerge for the embodied-relational being in the ongoing experience of work action and reflection. People move in communities, in interpersonal relationships, and in their relation to particular knowing from outside to inside or back, from more peripheral to more central positions or back, and from more open to more closed positions and vice versa.

We should look more closely at these movements in positionality among people in workplace situations and examine how these correspond to emotions and learning. Research of this type would be best directed at finding out how people answer questions like: ‘What is worth doing?’ and ‘What is my purpose in my life through this kind of work?’. Moreover, a larger study or fieldwork in another workplace setting might want to incorporate an analysis based on social class, power relations, gender, ethnicity, sexuality or spirituality. Second, the findings of this study about the interplay between emotions and workplace learning raise some questions about organisational interventions derived from prescribed outcomes, or competency-based approaches that preclude individuals’ complex ways of constructing knowledge.

This questioning suggests the appreciation of emotions and workplace learning as complex phenomena: they cannot be quantified, reduced for convenience to time-bounded organisational approaches to training, nor flow-charted into fragmented performance outcomes. Another insight is the realisation that professional knowledge (skills and concepts), as holistically emotional, intuitive and attitudinal as it is in the learning and doing process, is embodied fairly quickly when people's own intentions are aligned with experiences instructing them in certain procedures. By far the most effective means by which many HRD professionals in this study embodied new procedures was through processes of socialisation into the new community of practice. The importance of community ethos in shaping approaches to emotions and workplace learning points to issues of organisational culture and leadership.

The workplace plays a fundamental role in promoting the development of the emotional and learning abilities among staff by providing opportunities for open discussion and feedback. Workplace communities that are supportive and offer guidance to extend the development of practitioners through all stages of their professional journey are essential. In this regard, we need to further investigate the relationship between the pragmatist concepts of 'experience', 'inquiry', 'habit' and 'transaction' (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011) as they may help us to improve our understanding of the complexities of people's own perspectives on their emotions and learning.

Better questions might be: ‘What is relevant?’; ‘What is worth learning and doing in a particular situated moment for a particular embodied-relational being or community?’; ‘What is convenient for whom, and what should be done next?’. Finally, an empirical point of departure for future research may be people’s biographies such as their descriptions of lived and living lives in time and space (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011). This could be meaningful and useful for potential emotional and learning development.

9.5 Final Reflections

It was a privilege to have known the HRD professionals who participated in this study, and I have learned many things from them. Reflecting on my own practice I have come to terms with doing social research which “seeks to open up the social world in all of its dynamic dimensions, enables people to come to terms with their everyday experience themselves, taking seriously lives that are loaded with multiple interpretations and grounded in cultural complexity” (Denzin, 1989: 81). The findings of this study confirm the fact that work is the crucial terrain where professionals map journeys to seek meaning, identity and connection with their life-world. But the fact that professionals’ emotions and intentions affect what they perceive, value, engage in and learn from workplace experience has important implications. Some emotions and intentions may be aligned with the organisation’s goals of innovation or open dialogue, but the focus of the professional on new challenges, creative passion, meaningful relationships, self-knowledge and a search for the self directs how and what professionals learn in ways not necessarily aligned with organisational goals and competitive advantage.

In fact, it was the experience of ambiguity, doubt, conflict, shifting priorities and relationships that characterised participants' stories in this study. This seems to suggest that current literature on workplace learning needs to better address the individual's understanding of the interplay among emotions, work and learning. What appears missing from the literature is an appreciation of how that interplay crosses, in people's lives, between family, work, personal relationships, play and spirituality. My study indicates that professionals and, presumably, workers in general, find themselves asking difficult questions about the purpose of tasks and projects in their work: 'What is worth doing?'; 'Why are we doing this project?'; 'How might it affect people?'; 'What are the consequences for the natural environment?'; 'Do we really want this?'. Thus, this thesis suggests that a more reflective and ethical approach is needed in developing social practices at work. This challenge could be assisted by asking the embodied-relational beings doing the learning and by sustaining the ethical dimension of workplace learning through education and training practices that are more critically centred on 'phronesis' that is, on 'practical wisdom'. In hermeneutical-pragmatist terms, involvement in practice calls on the capacity of "*phronesis*, understanding, reason, and choice which speak to the reflective nature not only of practice itself but of the act of participation that it invariably presupposes" (Fairfield, 2000: 7).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Information Letter

The Living Experience of Emotions and Workplace Learning: A Relational View

I am writing to invite you to take part in a research project on your participation in learning and emotional activities that are found in your HRD Office. I am a graduate student and this research is partial fulfilment of my PhD in Management Studies at the University of Leicester (UK).

The main purpose of the research is an exploration as to how learning and emotions are experienced by professionals within their HRD Office, and their community of practice. The information I obtain through interviews will be used only for the aims of my thesis.

This study will also investigate the interconnections between learning and emotions in the working lives of the professionals who participate in the process. The objective of the research is to answer this main question: **How do HRD professionals experience the everyday interplay between their emotions and their workplace learning?**

The study highlights the socially constructed nature of learning and emotions and looks at them from a relational perspective. The goal is to further the understanding of both topics.

Your role in this research will include one confidential personal interview that will last no more than two hours, and other two to validate data and discuss emerging findings. These interviews will be arranged at your convenience, in a location within your Bank.

I will conduct personally the interviews, and with your consent they will be taped. Whilst you are working, I would like to feel free to observe interactions between you and your co-workers, and also to have informal conversations with you. These informal discussions will give us both an opportunity to explore some of your beliefs and understandings about emotions and learning at work. I will also be making field notes during these periods of observation.

This research is entirely unrelated to any employee evaluations and will have no impact on your job role. Precautions will be taken to ensure your participation is not apparent to others in the Bank. Every effort will be carried out to secure your contribution is confidential, and no interview data with individuals names, positions, or other identifying information will be provided to the Bank or other participants, only aggregated summary data.

The interview tapes will be discarded upon transcription of the recorded material. This material will only be accessed by the researcher and it will be stored in a locked file to further ensure confidentiality. This data will be destroyed following thesis submission (by September 2012).

If you are willing to participate please complete the following consent form and return it to me utilising the envelope provided. Please feel free to contact me with any questions via e-mail xxxxxxxxxxx or telephone xxxxxxxxxxx. In the event that you have complaint during the study or a query, please write to this address:

xxxxxxxxxxxxx – xxxxxxxxxxx

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

I have read the information letter for this study and have had the details explained to me. My questions about the research have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I _____ **agree** to participate in the project entitled **The Living Experience of Emotions and Workplace Learning: A Relational View**, as described above, and **I understand my information will be treated as confidential, and anonymous** and agree to the following:

- ⇒ My participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- ⇒ I may withdraw at any time.
- ⇒ I will take part in personal interviews with the researcher, each one lasting no more than two hours, at a time of my convenience.
- ⇒ These interviews may be tape recorded as a data source for this project.
- ⇒ My interviews responses will be confidential and anonymous, and nobody will be made aware of any details of them.
- ⇒ Information selected from interviews may be used in the research and published, and I will receive no direct benefits from this study.

Signed _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

First Interview – Focused Life History

(Putting the participant's experiences in context)

1. Would you briefly tell me about your personal history and educational background?
2. How did you become a HRD professional?
3. How long have you done this job?
4. What is the range of tasks you are expected to conduct at work?
5. Who do you work with?
6. What do you talk about with your co-workers?
7. What happens when you work with other people?
8. How do you feel about having to work with other people?
9. How would you describe the work environment here?
10. Please tell me about your past experience of learning at work.
11. Please tell me about the kind of emotions you experienced in the past at work.

Probes for understanding and for further examples.

Second Interview – Details of Current Experience

(Focusing on recreating current experiences)

1. How do you learn new things or skills to keep up with changes in your job?
2. How do you prefer to learn?
3. How do you learn from other people at work? Can you give an example?
4. Is there anything that helps or hinders your learning at work?
5. What role do emotions play in your job as a HRD professional?

6. Think about a specific recent situation when you experienced strong emotions at work.
Could you describe the situation to me?
 - Describe the emotions you experienced.
 - Describe the actions you took and your thoughts during that experience.
7. What are the appropriate emotional norms in your workplace?
8. How do you learn to work with your emotions?
9. How do you think emotions and learning fashion your experiences at work?

Probes for understanding and for further examples.

Third Interview - Reflection and Sensemaking

(Reflecting on the meaning of the participant's experiences)

1. Given what you reconstructed about your emotional experiences at work, how do you make sense of those experiences?
 2. Given what you reconstructed about your learning experiences at work, how do you make sense of those experiences?
 3. Given what you reconstructed about your emotional and learning experiences, how do you make sense of your experience of the interplay between emotions and learning at work?
 4. Any additional thoughts you want to add?
-

Probing Questions

- Can you describe the situation in more detail, please?
- Can you give me an example of that, please?
- How did that make you feel?
- How did you deal with that situation?
- It seems to me like your saying ... would you like to elaborate/clarify?
- What were your thoughts at that time?

(And other questions depending on responses).

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