

emergency and relief organizations".<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, Australia is not exempt from this charge. Over the years there have been some remarkable examples of poor inter-organizational integration, rigid boundary maintenance, and intense inter-organizational competition. The following examples illustrate the fragmented system of counter-disaster management which highlights the lack of interlocking between the various emergency services, fostered by an undue emphasis on boundary maintenance, inter-organizational jealousies, ignorance of the ability of other services, overlapping jurisdictions, inadequate (and often inappropriate) statutory requirements, poor liaison between the services, which in some cases is exacerbated by an artificial division of responsibility based upon hazard-specific lines that appear to be related to spreading the cost of natural hazard intervention over a number of government agencies rather than to indicate where final responsibility or authority is located within the DRON. The reader is reminded here of the points raised in the statement issued by the NSW Minister for Police and Emergency Services concerning the problems of rivalry between the State's rescue services, and which were noted in an earlier section of this paper. In the case of bushfires, the following examples illustrate many of the points made above:

1. "[In the late 1970's] a policeman, on his motorbike, noticed a fire in the bush on the hills at the back of a new housing suburb. He called the Rural Fire Brigade for their assistance, and was told they were unable to attend at the present time because they were engaged in suppressing another fire and had no available resources to attend another. So the policeman radioed the urban fire brigade and asked them to render assistance. They arrived at the scene, took one look at [the fire's] location and promptly stated that it was 100 yards in the bush, therefore it was in a rural area and not urban, and hence not their problem. With that they left. The rural fire brigade, after dealing with the previous fire, came upon the scene, but by that time the fire was burning around the back fences of the houses. The rural fire brigade left, refusing to fight [the fire] because it was now an urban fire. So the urban fire brigade was recalled, and they put it out".<sup>64</sup>
2. "A large number of these fires were not known to the Regional Officer [of an S/TES] until after the declaration of the Special Emergency. ... It was also doubtful whether any of the other authorities who were involved in fire-

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<sup>63</sup> Stretton, 1979:506.

<sup>64</sup> In, Britton, 1983:137.

suppression actions ... had a clear total picture of the fire situation until after the Special Emergency situation had been declared and [had] forced them to combine (with some degree of success) their activities".<sup>65</sup>

3. "The Regional Officer made a recommendation that the lead authorities should remain at the [SES] Regional Headquarters so that a united inter-organizational approach to the quelling of the bushfires could be given full attention. This recommendation however, was not well-received and did not eventuate".<sup>66</sup>

The 1983 'Ash Wednesday' bushfires in south-east Australia was an alarming and tragic episode for the way in which the emergency services functioned, just as much as it was a tragedy for the many resident bushfire-victims:

4. "The [State SES], which under [the State disaster plan] has responsibility for supplementing combating agencies during bushfire outbreaks, was not formally advised that there was a bushfire emergency, or that other DRON members had commenced operations until the day following the 16 February outbreaks".<sup>67</sup>
5. "Situation reports were not distributed among the organizations involved. This created a problem because there was no regular feeding of information from organization to organization about the situation at hand. It took two days for Liaison Officers to be called, whereas under [the State disaster plan], these personnel should be brought in immediately a crisis period involves the network".<sup>68</sup>
6. "The Red Cross Society set up evacuation centres for the bushfire victims without informing other welfare-oriented organizations of their intentions. It appears that the Red Cross did not consider the use of their [disaster liaison officer] in this particular situation. St Vincent de Paul sent representatives to some of the bushfire stricken areas and provided caravans in other locations without reference to the [state disaster] Welfare Plan provisions. It is interesting to note that in the case of St Vincent de Paul, this voluntary

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p83.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p86.

<sup>67</sup> Britton, 1986a:119.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

agency had previously declined to participate in the State Disaster Welfare Plan".<sup>69</sup>

7. "On the Friday 18 February, following the Ash Wednesday fires, the Director-General of the Department of Community Welfare Services called a welfare meeting without informing [the SES], or offering an invitation to them to attend, despite the pre-eminent role of [the SES] within welfare aspects of disaster operations in [the State], as suggested under [the disaster plan]. [The SES] attended subsequent meetings, however, albeit without being officially invited by the Community Welfare Service Department".<sup>70</sup>
8. "A large number of requests submitted by [the SES] to the police for Natural Disasters Organisation assistance were delayed for periods of two hours or longer because the Police Department failed to realise the importance of the requests".<sup>71</sup>
9. "With reference to the [Emergency Service Liaison Officer] system, a number of disaster-relevant organizations did not send Liaison Officers to the State Disaster Headquarters at the Police Department Headquarters because they apparently did not recognize the importance of the role. In the words of one senior official, the lack of ESLOs "often stuffed things up" because Disaster HQ had to contact the organization directly, often experiencing considerable delays while the organization in question was contacted in the first instance and then it was necessary to wait for a person to be found who had authority to assent to the request".<sup>72</sup>
10. "A number of complaints from several organizational sources mentioned that office-bearers from other organizations, as well as their own, did not fully understand what [the State disaster plan] was, how it worked, and what role they were meant to perform. This inability to understand the functions of the planning procedure caused additional confusion at a time when confusion was reigning supreme".<sup>73</sup>

Regardless of the bearing these types of actions had on the

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<sup>69</sup> Oliver, Britton & James, 1984:112.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p112.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* p113.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

effectiveness of the State's counter-disaster facilities during the 1983 fires, key interest groups believed that alterations to the disaster management system were unwarranted. Most of the 413 submissions received by the Public Service Board advocated a 'no change' or a 'minimal change' position.<sup>74</sup>

Research reports on the 1967 bushfires gives a clear indication that the generally uncoordinated approach to disaster management exhibited in the 1983 conflagration is ingrained:

11. "In general, the organizational response to the disaster was characterized by a lack of coordination within and between organizations. By and large, the Hobart [Fire] Brigade worked apart from other organizations involved in emergency activities. Furthermore, there was little coordination between crews in the Brigade; they functioned to a considerable degree as independent units. The nature of the highly uncoordinated nature of the fire fighting responses in the rural areas has already been discussed in detail. The police operation, too, was not highly coordinated and lacked central control. While some important decisions were made at police headquarters, most officers in the field were permitted to select their own tasks and procedures especially on 'Black Tuesday'".<sup>75</sup>
12. "One consequence of the lack of coordination was that a set of priorities never developed during the emergency. That is, there was never any explicit (and seemingly also implicit) understanding where the major fire fighting efforts ought to be concentrated, what areas if any ought to be abandoned, how different future contingencies (such as a partial or total evacuation of Hobart) might be handled, etc.". <sup>76</sup>

Flood impacts have produced similar results. Reporting on the 'Australia Day' floods that occurred in south-east Queensland during January 1974, the authors state that:

13. "First and foremost, it was obvious that the general level of preparedness for work in a disaster situation among organizations was very low ... This even applied to the large public organizations which were directly

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<sup>74</sup> See Britton, 1986a:122-3.

<sup>75</sup> Anderson, 1967:29.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.* p29-30.

involved in giving emergency assistance during the height of the crisis, i.e. the Police Force and the Civil Defence Organization. ... In particular, it was noted that there were no overall plans for co-ordinated evacuation, nor any pre-mobilization plans for emergency purposes".<sup>77</sup>

14. "Time and again the researchers encountered criticism among the helpers and their organizations about the lack of co-ordination and direction which hampered the relief work at every level, resulting in conflict, confusion and duplication of effort. The most glaring examples of lack of co-ordination and co-operation occurred among the various echelons of government, both on inter- and intra-governmental levels".<sup>78</sup>
15. "Following repeated helper criticism of areas related to co-ordination and direction, the researchers asked quite specifically whether these had been of major importance. Most respondents, 52% recorded an unequivocal 'yes' response; a further 15% said 'possibly'; 13% believed they had not been important".<sup>79</sup>
16. "As a result of the political wrangling, there were two separately administered relief funds, State and city, and two different networks of relief centres, also separately administered - evidence for all to see of the lack of co-operation and consequent waste of resources".<sup>80</sup>

However, the research team also reported that,

17. "When governments departments were able to extricate themselves from the game of political one-upmanship, their co-ordination efforts were extremely successful".<sup>81</sup>

Notwithstanding the extent of the flood hazard in Australia, the response to this specific hazard also seems to be bureaucratically-oriented:

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<sup>77</sup> Chamberlain et al., 1981:223.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* p203.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p224.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.* p201.

18. "response by the authorities was generally unco-ordinated and reactive to specific flood episodes. The 1970's and 1980's, however, have seen many water policy initiatives by both state and federal governments".<sup>82</sup> (emphasis not in original)

The reference to State-Federal rivalries (in citation #16 above) remind us that these problems are not restricted to any specific level of government. In his personal account of the immediate aftermath of tropical cyclone 'Tracy', Stretton is quite clear as to why there was a reasonably smooth Federal government response to one of Australia's more devastating disasters:

19. "The fact that the disaster occurred on Christmas morning meant that Australian Government departments were on stand down and many Permanent Heads and senior officials were out of Canberra. This enabled the Natural Disasters Organisation to seize the initiative and to move elements of the key departments into the National Emergency Operations Centre. There is a probability that if the disaster had occurred during normal working hours, some departments would have resented any effort by [NDO] to co-ordinate their activities. This would have led to friction, duplication and inefficiency".<sup>83</sup>

This particular point was also noted by researchers who went into the field following the cyclone disaster.<sup>84</sup>

Speculating on why "the local authorities in Darwin were completely unprepared"<sup>85</sup> for the cyclone, even though the Tropical Cyclone Warning Centre in Darwin had plotted it for nearly four days prior to landfall, and that it was apparent the city was threatened, Stretton offers the following:

20. "The original Northern Territory Disaster Plan appointed the Commissioner of Police as Co-ordinator. However, officials of the Department of the Northern Territory were reluctant to accept a subordinate position to the Police Commissioner in an emergency, and early in October 1974, the Secretary of the Department ... requested the Department of Defence to

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<sup>82</sup> Smith & Handmer, 1984:105.

<sup>83</sup> Stretton, 1976:197-8.

<sup>84</sup> See for instance, Haas, Cochrane & Eddy, 1976.

<sup>85</sup> Stretton, 1979:9.

provide an officer on loan to examine the organisation and plans to deal with emergencies in the Northern Territory. ... An officer from the Joint Staff of the Department of Defence was subsequently made available to the Department of the Northern Territory to make this study. In his report ... he recommended that an officer of the Department of the Northern Territory should be appointed as the Director of the Emergency Services. ... The Commissioner of Police did not agree with aspects of this report and considered that his basic responsibilities for the preservation of life and property should not be transferred to a public servant. It was thus the unhappy circumstances of switching responsibilities in the middle of the disaster season that could have had a bearing on the lack of initiative shown by local officials on Christmas Eve".<sup>86</sup>

A national study which focussed on the role of a particular disaster management agency was conducted in July 1983.<sup>87</sup> Some of the questions were directed towards aspects of inter-organizational relations. These questions found that:

- 21. - 50% of the respondents declared their organization's role was not readily accepted by other personnel in the disaster-relevant organizational network;<sup>88</sup>
- Of the Headquarter staff, 52% believed their organizational was not accepted by the DRON;
- Of the Regional staff, 64% believed the role of their

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p12-13.

<sup>87</sup> Britton, 1985. Approval for the study was gained from the eight Directors of the State/Territory Emergency Services organizations for a questionnaire to be circulated to all permanent members of their respective organization. Two Directors subsequently refused to participate. As a result, the study could only survey 89% of the total possible population of permanent S/TES staff. The questionnaire, and a reply-paid envelope, was distributed by mail. Of the total number of questionnaires distributed 44.5% were completed and returned.

<sup>88</sup> Of this number, 28% spontaneously identified the Police as one particular organization which did not accept the S/TES role in disaster management; 26% identified the Fire Services; 19% identified the professional emergency service organizations as a whole; 16% identified voluntary agencies; 6% identified Ambulance services; and 4% identified other medical and health services.

organization was not accepted by other DRON members;

- 44% of the respondents who declared their organization's role was not accepted by other DRON members also stated the role of their organization was not understood by the other organizations;

Forty percent of the respondents took advantage of the questionnaire to provide additional information about factors relating to the functioning of their organization. Ninety-two percent of these provided statements that contained critical comments relating to both inter- or intra-organizational aspects. Among the comments concerning inter-organizational relations are the following:

22. "I didn't realize how ingrained the difficulties between the various emergency services are. I am surprised about the types of difficulties that are evident. For example, lack of uniformity over equipment; the reluctance of specific organizations to lend equipment to other organizations, although in theory all counter-disaster equipment and resources are the property of the State. It seems obvious that the chiefs of our emergency services are not willing to subordinate their organizations for the good of the emergency network".

"The biggest single problem with the state disaster plan is that the other organizations involved do not appreciate the nature and the necessity of multi-organizational communication. This is partly because counter-disaster operations is a secondary role for the other organizations, whereas it is a primary role for [us]".

"This State has no specific legislation, no formally accepted role for the Service, and a policy of ignoring the Service until the unbelievable occurs".

"The role [of the organization] is only a support role, mainly because this is the role which the more traditional counter-disaster organizations have given- or allowed us to undertake".

"One of the greatest inhibiting factors in developing sound counter-disaster response capabilities is that relating to a fear by ... authorities of territorial or functional encroachment. Whilst the precept of coordination of services is widely applauded, the enactment of this principle is rarely practiced".

"The police believe they have the role as being the absolute authority. So they virtually take control of



anything".

"They [the police] think that coordination is control, and they can't tell the difference between control and coordination".

"The firemen, for whatever reason, are trying to take over certain areas and expand their operations. They are trying to become the combat authority, coordinators, controllers, and whatever".<sup>89</sup>

There are also intra-organizational problems which impact on counter-disaster effectiveness. The 1983 survey identified some aspects of this:

23. - 37% of the respondents had held a volunteer position in the organization. Of these, 41% indicated that during the time they were volunteers they felt the permanent officers considered themselves superior to volunteers during non-emergency situations; and 36% felt this attitude continued during operational periods.
- 49% of the respondents indicated they had little job independence during non-operational periods, compared with 39% who expressed the belief they had some degree of job independence, while 13% stated they were very free;
- During an emergency response period 40% considered they had little job independence, while those who felt they had some degree to pursue their own course of action rose to 48%, with 12% stating they had complete job independence;
- 48% of the respondents indicated they ought to have more flexibility during non-operational periods; and 38% suggested more flexibility would be beneficial during an emergency;
- 48% of the respondents stated they had never been involved in any evaluation procedure conducted by their organization relating to their disaster management function (49% of regional staff, and 40% of headquarter staff indicated this);
- 43% did not agree with the format usually adopted to evaluate post-impact organizational operations (the most frequent single procedure for evaluation was the

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<sup>89</sup> Britton, 1985:171-213.

'selected member debrief' type. Most of the respondents would prefer a 'roundhouse debrief' procedure.<sup>90</sup>

Some wide-ranging additional comments offered by the respondents put these statistics into context:

24. "I find that the management does not take enough notice of the people in the field. [They should be] more willing to listen and help employees".

"The lack of application of adequate management techniques results in the limited effectiveness of the service and the only thing which carries the service through is the dedication of some staff members".

"Problems with top management occur. An obsessional fear of political consequences has meant that staff members are left with responsibility without the authority to act. Lack of true delegation has slowly eroded initiative and innovation and action at lower levels". (emphasis in original)

"I would like to see honest, critical assessment at State Headquarters level, because until we get that, I don't think there are going to be any changes ... I see that a lot of the State HQ policies are there to protect itself. ... The State HQ plans to protect itself, and that isn't always the best for the operators. ... We have tried to get a few things pushed through the State HQ, and have had no success. But every now and then, we get something done, especially when we do our homework and get the rest of the local branches on our side".

"We get directives from State, not consultations. ... We are consulted over some things in due course, but they are not the important things; but we aren't consulted enough, or soon enough. ... We seldom get the answers we want when we request information".

"I am of the opinion that the hierarchy are all wrapped up in themselves and do not think of persons at the grass-roots level - we are the people that count. Counter-disaster plans are a good idea if the persons at the bottom are well-equipped and have high unit morale. Just simple things, such as support from above and the occasional new overalls will eventually create a State body that can be proud of itself, not as it is

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.* p223-246.

at the moment - overloaded with ex-Colonels and the like - a haven for overpaid has-beens".<sup>91</sup>

Studies relating to specific hazard impact episodes have also brought out particular intra-organizational difficulties. In some instances, the response of Headquarter staff to field requests appear to question the competence of their people in the field, as well as not appearing to fully comprehend the necessity for, or the urgency related to, field operational requests :

25. "The Division Controller considered it expedient to request [State Headquarter to] place a helicopter on stand-by for immediate use should it be required. There was an initial reluctance ... to agree to the request [on the pretext] that helicopters had to be 'tasked' and not placed on stand-by".<sup>92</sup>
26. "With the experience gained from events over the previous few days ... the Controller ... telexed a request to State Headquarters for ten portable radio-receiver sets to be despatched immediately. ... They did not reach [the Division Headquarter] until the afternoon of Friday 15 April [four and a half days later], having been transported by rail and road [rather than having them flown in]".<sup>93</sup>

While these excerpts do not provide conclusive evidence, they are indicative of the bureaucratic imperative. They do suggest however, that the orientation of many of the actions within counter-disaster organizations appear to rest on the maintenance of the status quo of the organizational hierarchy rather than the development of effective community disaster preparedness and response measures. In some of the crucial disaster management positions, senior officials either come into the organization from public service positions or from operational areas that do not have a specific disaster orientation. In either case, many decision-makers have little direct knowledge of disaster management or contact with disaster field operations. They thus bring little expertise of knowledge or skill in disaster management. Similarly, because counter-disaster does not appear to be a high priority on any government agenda, counter-disaster skills are not highly regarded. The situation in the disaster management field might be expressed by the following general propositions:

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<sup>91</sup> *ibid.* p246-54.

<sup>92</sup> Britton, 1989:84.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* p89-90.

1. Within the organization, internal influencers (those with decision-making roles) possess legitimate power rather than expert power within the organization;
2. The orientation of these individuals is directed towards the maintenance of the organization's administrative functions;
3. Power holders in the DRON (who are in a position to influence the direction of the networks), have an abiding interest in maintaining an administrative equilibrium within the network, even to the point of maintaining the administrative status quo over the pursuit of effective disaster management capabilities. This position is 'affordable' because of the infrequency of social crisis events that of disaster proportions;
4. Organizational operatives with disaster-specific skill, expertise, and experience are not in key policy-making positions (they are more likely to be permanent volunteers or regional functionaries who are closer to the 'grass-roots' level), and have little input into organizational decision-making);
5. The skilled operatives are aware that functionaries (i) do not possess disaster management skills, and (ii) have little influence outside the organization, particularly in the DRON.

Internal influencers typically:

1. Are primarily administrators drawn from the ranks of the public service (i.e. they tend not to bring specific disaster management skills into the organization);
2. Tend to have a reactive rather than a proactive orientation to management and planning for disasters.
3. Are distanced geographically from the impact zone and rely on information (situation reports) from subordinates in the field (regional officers or permanent volunteers;
4. Have little continuing first-hand experience in community disaster management;
5. Tend not to attend courses or skills training sessions that are designed to develop or maintain disaster relevant skills and/or knowledge.

By contrast, front-line personnel in disaster management services typically:

1. Show considerable commitment to the organization's stated mission (the official goals of the organization);
2. Are not involved in the development of organizational goals, resource acquisition, allocation, etc.;
3. Make efforts to regularly maintain and/or upgrade (where possible) their training and knowledge;
4. Are typically the repository of the organization's 'hands-on' knowledge of local hazards and counter-disaster mitigation strategies (especially S/TES Division and Local Controllers);
5. Liaise directly and repeatedly with clients (community groups).

#### 4. Concluding remarks

My argument is that disaster management systems ought to be designed on the 'preferred' organic design rather than a continuation of the standard bureaucratic model. The current arrangement over-emphasizes organizational structure and administrative compliance, with a corresponding under-emphasis on organizational mission. This is coupled with an incompatible practice ideology by which decision-makers fail to fully appreciate the necessity of, and societal requirement for, the entire continuum of collective stress contingencies to be supported. There is also a need to encourage organizational specialization.

While this paper refers to the present inter-organizational disaster service structure as a network, the notion that the organizations are tied together is more a reflection of an ideal state. A more appropriate description would be to label it as a structure of individual components. In what might be regarded as a classic understatement, the examples we have noted above reinforce Pickup and Minor's observation that, "there is a need to reduce fragmentation of natural hazards related efforts within and between levels of government".<sup>94</sup> In some States at least, disaster management appears to be characterized by a confused, under-developed, and inadequately organized system, contained within a poorly constructed framework. It suffers from an inexact understanding of disaster, nebulous legislation which

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<sup>94</sup> Pickup & Minor, 1980:104.

creates imprecise organizational mission, lack of effective inter-organizational coordination with duplication occurring in both assumed and real tasks, and some of the disaster-relevant organizations are not provided with the power, status, and authority to carry out their charters effectively. One of the more disturbing outcomes of this specific orientation is that too little emphasis is placed on the proactive tasks of disaster management. Danger signs go unnoticed or are misunderstood because of erroneous assumptions that are made on the basis of incomplete or inappropriate information. Difficulties in handling unfamiliar information, from unfamiliar sources, are experienced because the system is oriented toward a different practice ideology.

Coordination plays a key role in effecting successful inter-organizational actions and disaster situations necessitate concerted and preplanned action if a successful outcome is to be achieved. However, irrespective of the creation of executive coordination committees and other organizational structures, there are no mechanisms within which current disaster planning arrangements turn the notion of coordination into a workable tool for effective disaster management. There is, for example, no reference within existing planning mechanisms describing how the process of coordination is to be implemented, and although there is a degree of awareness amongst some disaster managers of the necessity for preparatory measures there is little evidence that it is given high priority by the network as a whole. The net outcome is that the potential for coordination is not realized. Without prior arrangements based on mutual assistance and support, the organizations comprising the DRON are likely to conduct their traditional roles, adapting them to the existing emergency function model complete with organization-specific chains of command, intelligence structures, and resource utilization practices.<sup>95</sup> This could result in a multiplicity of single organizational actions that collectively fail to remedy the problem caused by disaster as efficiently and successfully as possible.

This paper has argued that part of the reason why the network potential has not been directed towards effective disaster management is because there is an undue emphasis on the bureaucratic imperative - the administrative means and ends. This is another aspect of the predominant 'emergency' services theory-in-use which assumes that by allowing emergency organizations to have control of disaster operations, society will have a viable counter-disaster capability. In certain crucial respects, this can be viewed as formalizing

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<sup>95</sup> See Aldrich, 1978:63.

organizational 'drift' or 'goal displacement'.<sup>96</sup> It is also an example of how organizations construct social reality.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps we need to be reminded of what Warriner wrote, in his classic piece on the intentions of organizations. Warriner asserted that, in general, official statements of organizational purpose should be treated as fictions produced by an organization to account for, explain, or rationalize its existence to particular audiences.<sup>98</sup> In this respect, the bureaucratic imperative leads to a concentration on administrative rather than on mission functions.

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<sup>96</sup> See Perrow, 1986.

<sup>97</sup> See for instance, Thompson (1980) and Salaman (1980), in Salaman & Thompson (edt), 1980. See also Aberbach & Rockman, 1987.

<sup>98</sup> Warriner, 1965.

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