CHAPTER -2

RE-CENTERING THE EMPLOYEE IN THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL LITERATURE

Appraisal is a compulsively fascinating subject, full of paradoxes and love-hate relationships. And appraisal schemes are real/v controversial, companies carry out a major overhaul of their policies and practices in this area about every third year on an average. Some schemes are popular, with overtones of evangelical fervor, while others are at least as equal/v detested and derived as ‘the annual rain dance’, ‘the end of term report’, etc. (Holdsworth 1991:65)

2.1: Introduction

Chapter 1 identified the key research question of the thesis as the quest to understand why employees were reacting with such hostility and anger to the implementation of a performance appraisal system. Their impassioned resistance occurred despite the fact that, according to the Management, there were no direct links to pay, promotion, or redundancies. Given that the primary research question has been identified, this chapter now delineates some fields of study relevant to the research question. The specific purpose of the chapter is to review existing literature on the nature and purposes of performance appraisal and its effects on employees. Since it would be impractical to review the thousands of articles which have been written about performance appraisal, aspects of the existing literature relevant to the research question will be chosen. Emerging from the literature review process is a natural history of the development of
sets of ideas with respect to performance appraisal. However, the primary purpose of the chapter is to develop a critical perspective on the appraisal literature. Towards this end, aspects of the extant literature will be used to ‘frame’ this thesis as it investigates key implications of performance appraisal on employees in the organizations.

2.2 : Review of Literature :

A recent review of HRM literature (of which appraisal is a subset) indicates that a great deal of the academic literature remains ‘prescriptive, functionalist and uncritical’ (Watson 2004:447). Much of the appraisal literature continues to focus on design and implementation issues from a managerial perspective. While there have been employee surveys of satisfaction with appraisals and appraisers (Boswell and Boudreau 2000), very little research has focused on theorizing employee reactions to appraisal in a sociologically informed or critical manner (Thompson and Ackroyd 1995; Bacon 1999; Fournier and Grey 2000; Watson 2004). Legge (2005) argues for analysis of HRM in its broad socio-political context, and this thesis heeds that its contribution would lead shortly to a ‘critical and theoretically sophisticated psycho-social scientific study of employment-related managerial practices’ (Watson 2004:447). This is accomplished through its theorizing of employee responses to the managerially imposed practice of appraisal, in such a way that ‘full weight is given to both human-managerial agency and to structural circumstances’ (Watson 2004:450, emphasis in original). What the extant literature says about these themes will be addressed in this chapter and the next, and will provide a framework to guide the empirical research that follows. This chapter is structured on the following basis. First, to introduce a framework which divides relevant literature into four quadrants based on prescriptive and critical streams of
literature. Analysis of the prescriptive stream starts by examining typical definitions of appraisal (Section 2.3.1) highlighting some of the key assumptions implicit in these definitions. Section 2.3.2 reviews studies that have investigated employee responses from the functionalist or prescriptive perspective. Section 2.3.3 examines research perspectives in the critical management literature on appraisal and its theorization of power and control. Section 2.3.4 reviews issues raised in the employee-centered literature. The view that performance appraisal inevitably ‘subjugates’ employees is contested by a small but growing body of critical literature which seeks to ‘re-centre’ the employee (Grant and Shields 2002; and 2006). This literature is reviewed, and a framework created which the thesis uses as a basis for analyzing the empirical data collected throughout the research period. Section 2.4 concludes the chapter with a summary of the existing literature and proposes a way forward using a more critical and theoretically informed approach to studying employee responses to performance appraisal.

2.2 ‘Appraising’ the literature: A framework for classifying studies of appraisal

Employing the broad classification scheme used by Watson (2004:447) in his critique of the HRM literature, we can identify two broad streams of appraisal literature, namely the ‘prescriptive, functionalist, uncritical’ stream, and the ‘non-prescriptive and critical’ stream. The prescriptive approach is often described as managerial or unitary oriented (Hollinshead and Leat 1995; Doolin 2003). The managerial frame of reference is characterized by an approach that prescribes ways in which employees, as the objects of
‘good’ HRM practice, should be managed to achieve organizational goals. This approach assumes that it is possible to achieve outcomes that are mutually beneficial to employers and employees, typically without the intervention of third parties such as unions or industrial tribunals (Shields 2007:9). Managerial approaches are often deterministic in that they assume a straightforward causal link between the decisions of managers and desired organizational outcomes (Doolin 2003:753). Harley and Hardy (2004:380) use different terminology but likewise differentiate between the ‘critical’ and ‘mainstream’ positions in debates about HRM. Legge (2001), writing from a critical perspective, refers to the mainstream position as modernist, normative and positivist.

On the other hand, the critical stream of appraisal literature has been strengthened by the growing interest in critical management studies, which draws upon a plurality of intellectual traditions (Alvesson and Willmott 2003:15) and is ‘a political project in the sense that it aims to unmask and uncover the power relations around which social and organizational life are woven together’ (Fouruier and Grey 2000:19). These two broad streams of appraisal literature are each further divided into sub themes, distinguished on the basis of employee-centered and employee de-centered approaches. De-centered approaches rarely move beyond ‘considering workers (discursively) as resource-objects’ (Grant and Shields 2006:294). Employee-centered approaches, on the other hand, ‘recognize and respect [workers] as whole subjects’ and seek ‘to understand them on their own terms’ (Humanistic approach) (Grant and Shields 2006:302, 299).

These categories are represented conceptually in Table No. 2.1 Performance Appraisal: Perspectives in Research (below). The model captures the two dimensions
mentioned above: the extent to which the literature is prescriptive, functional and managerialistic, or critical, and the extent to which the literature is employee-centered or employee de-centered. While the boundaries of the prescriptive and critical categories (and their subcategories) are not fixed and absolute — in some cases it is difficult to fit a particular study into a particular ‘box’ — for analytical purposes these divisions provide a useful classificatory framework. This thesis is firmly positioned in Quadrant Four, where critiques of appraisal re-centre employees and establish their subjective experiences of appraisal as the area of research.

Table No. 2.1 : Performance Appraisal: Perspectives in Research

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadrant One</th>
<th>Quadrant Three</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prescriptive literature (managerialist, functionalist, uncritical and mostly unitary assumptions)</td>
<td>Critical literature (critiques of power and control which de-centre the employee)</td>
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<th>Quadrant Two</th>
<th>Quadrant Four</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prescriptive literature (employee interests considered when they promote organisational goals)</td>
<td>Critical literature (critiques which re-centre the employee)</td>
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2.3 The literature framework

Quadrant One, the prescriptive, managerialist approach, is where the majority of appraisal literature is located. Here, appraisal is viewed in instrumental terms as a managerial tool to achieve organizational goals. Little, if any, genuine attempt is made to understand the impact of appraisal on employees’ working lives. There may be
discussion of the ‘gap’ between words and deeds with respect to appraisal, but the literature displays scant awareness of developments in critical management studies that are relevant to appraisal. Years ago, Legge (1978:16), noted how ‘the prescriptive intention of these [HR.M] books’ had succumbed to ‘stilted generalizations that neglect both the complexities and dynamism of real organizations’. Storey’s assertion that ‘HRM is [still] an amalgam of description, prescription, and logical deduction’ (Storey 2001:6) well describes the approach of the HRM literature in Quadrant One, and demonstrates that this category of literature has not really responded to Legge’s (1978) earlier criticisms regarding the need for awareness of the micro-social dynamics of organizations. The employee is de-centered in this category of literature.

Quadrant Two also houses prescriptive literature, but unlike Quadrant One, here the employee is considered, but as an object to be managed for the sake of competitive advantage — as a human ‘resource’ or as human ‘capital’. Contributions to this stream are not focused on employee needs per se, nor on promoting employee wellbeing, nor on producing a fairer or more congenial working environment (Deeiy 2002). Rather, employee development, appraisal, employee assistance programs and other like initiatives are viewed in instrumental terms when they can be argued to provide unmistakable competitive advantage for the firm. The research, in Quadrant Two, has more to do with cutting labour costs or increasing labour productivity than understanding the needs of, or emitting the lived work experience of, workers - except insofar as they provide the basis for competitive advantage. The resource-based Human Resource Management literature (Wright et al. 2001) is an exemplar of this type of approach. Studies in Quadrants One and Two largely ignore power as a phenomenon or an
analytical construct. Where power is a factor as, for example, in the work of Frenkel et al. (1998), it is conceptualized as the property of management who seemingly are in a position to manipulate ‘variables’ so as to elicit job satisfaction, or employee commitment, or higher levels of discretionary effort (Amit Dhiman and Manjari Singh-2008- Vikalpa 32-1,2007).

On the other hand, Quadrants Three and Four represent critical studies wherein power and control in organizational contexts are central themes. In these quadrants, following the work of Michel Foucault (1980; 1982), power is generally conceptualized as a relationship, not a property of persons or groups. Quadrant Three includes the majority of the critical literature which identifies and explores power issues. However, the subject is conceptually de-centered in this critical approach (Grant and Shields 2002). This is due to the influence of Foucault, who claimed that ‘the subject is socially produced by the system of power which surrounds it’ (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998:459, emphasis added). Foucault was deeply critical of the conception of the subject as an individual endowed with consciousness, or individual entity with independent choice. Foucault, according to Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, viewed the subject as produced within discourse:

The individual is not a distinct, autonomous actor, a fixed, objective entity or a stable constellation of essential characteristics. Instead, the individual is a socially constituted, socially recognized, category of analysis who has multiple fragmented identities which are salient only insofar as they are socially recognized. (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998:459)

The subject is thus displaced from a privileged position in relation to the production of
meaning. It is discourse, not the subjects who speak it, which produces systems of meaning (Foucault 1972). Discourse, for Foucault, ‘is enmeshed with power, but it is not necessary to find ‘the subject” — the king, the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, the state, etc. — for power/knowledge to operate’ (Hall 2001:79, emphasis in original). In this sense, the subject is de-centered; the subject must be subjected to the rules and conventions of discourse, and its dispositions of power/knowledge. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. (Foucault-1982:115)

Quadrant Four, the critical and employee-centered literature, is the most relevant to the current research question of why employees were reacting so negatively to the introduction of an ‘orthodox’ performance appraisal system. It is in Quadrant Four where this thesis will make its contribution to the existing literature. The view that performance appraisal ‘subjugates’ employees is contested by a small but growing body of critical literature which seeks to ‘re-centre’ the employee (Grant and Shields, 2002: 309). This literature is reviewed, and an identity-focused framework is developed. Critically theorizing employee reactions to appraisal, supported by empirical research, will add to our understanding of the subjective effects of managerial practices in the workplace. Furthermore, the resulting conceptual framework developed in this thesis can be applied to a range of management practices in a variety of organizations, especially those in other organisations akin to the industries where study was carried out.
2.3.1 Prescriptive literature: Uncritical, managerialist perspectives (Quadrant One)

Performance appraisal has its roots in classical theories of organization which firmly locate power and control in the hands of management (Reed 1992). The origins of the annual performance appraisal reflect the assumptions of the age of scientific management, where the focus was on identifying the skills and knowledge of workers and using this information for the benefit of the organization. Frederick Winslow Taylor, widely considered to be the founding father of scientific management, based his work on the pursuit of efficiency (Procter et al. 2004). While inefficiency on the side of management could be attributed to incompetence, the key importance on the workers’ side was the phenomenon of ‘soldiering’. According to Taylor (1947:19), soldiering could take two forms. The first was what Taylor called the natural instinct or tendency of workers to take it easy, which he thus called natural soldiering. The second form occurred when workers colluded to restrict their output, which Taylor called systematic soldiering (Collinson and Ackroyd 2005:307). According to writers in the prescriptive management stream, both forms of soldiering could be managed by, among other things, performance appraisal. Appraisal, therefore, has historically carried connotations of distrust of workers and a process whereby labour can be ‘squeezed’ to wring extra effort (amid hopefully extra output) from an otherwise lazy or colluding workforce. Appraisal under scientific management principles thus was an attempt to overcome problems stemming from lack of control over the labour process. With few exceptions, Taylor’s emphasis on the individual as the focus for standardizing and formalizing work tasks became the bedrock of performance appraisal templates and continued to be in the lime light of HRM.
Between 1950 and 1980, appraisal research was primarily directed towards designing and improving the ‘instruments’ of assessment (Arvey and Murphy 1998). Thus, there were dozens of studies on the advantages and disadvantages of different types of rating scales, rating versus ranking, and of ways of rating that would provide the most ‘objective’ measures of performance. Appraisal was a formalized assessment and reporting system, based on a backward looking time-frame — usually the past 12 months. The focus was on evaluation of employees, on managerial control and worker accountability to superiors. Any consideration of employee response was purely at the behavioural level — how to get employees to be more efficient for the benefit of the company.

Coens and Jenkins (2000:14, emphasis in original) believe that five features are present when appraisal is used in its conventional form to judge individual performance in organizational settings. These five features are contained in their definition of appraisal as follows:

”The practice of performance appraisal is a mandated process in which, for a specified period of time, all or a group of employees’ work performance, behaviors, or traits are individually rated, judged, or described by a person other than the rated employee and the results are generally kept by the concerned organization under their custody.”

Their definition reveals conceptual assumptions of traditional appraisal as a judgmental process reflecting the rater’s capacity to judge validly and reliably the quality of work performed. The process is a mandatory evaluation of the success or failure of an employee’s efforts, and assigns judgment lights to ‘others’ in an organizational hierarchy. There is no scope for correction here. Coens and Jenkins (2000:13), interestingly, assert
that a tool in which the employee is the sole judge would be a developmental tool rather than a performance appraisal. Their definition also positions appraisal as a formal feedback process, not the informal chats about work processes and practices which may take place throughout the year as part of social interaction in the workplace. Interestingly, the emphasis above on procedural issues reinforces Holdsworth’s (1991:66) criticism that appraisals often over-emphasize procedure at the expense of analysis of outcomes. Employee responses are not considered in the above definition. Not surprisingly, most definitions of performance appraisal stemming from the prescriptive literature converge around themes of formal assessment of employee performance, for organizational gains. The following definition by Hirtel et al. (2007:342) is typical of those in the mainstream literature: "Performance appraisal is another SHRM [strategic human resource management] tool which is used to fill performance gaps and is defined as a formal and mutually agreed upon system of planning and reviewing employee performance (e.g. skills, abilities, knowledge and attitude.

This definition is significant in that its focus is on filling performance gaps, hence positioning appraisal as a deficit model of performance management. This focus on measuring inadequacies assumes that if an employee is informed about performance deficiencies, somehow that message will, of itself, elicit performance improvement. Under the prescriptive view, performance appraisal is a process whereby an organization (supervisor) assigns a score or some form of rating hierarchy to indicate the level of performance of a target person or group. It is assumed that an assigned score (not the process) will improve subsequent performance. This stream of literature is blind to the
impact of appraisal on the subjective experiences of employees. It mostly ignores employee reactions to appraisal, or where this is not possible, it considers negative employee reactions to be dysfunctional and a problem to be ‘fixed’ by fine-tuning the appraisal instrument, or by providing better appraisal training for the rater or the employee.

Härtel et al. ‘s (2007) definition above, like most of the appraisal definitions in Quadrant One, is expressed from a *managerialist* perspective. No mention is made of what appraisal does to employees. It is further assumed that employees will ‘mutually agree’ with management plans and goals; besides that employees will ‘mutually agree’ with management’s ‘review’ of employee performance. When an employee’s future job security, financial security and promotional prospects depend on reaching agreement with management, the sanctity of the said ‘agreement’ reached in a formal interview setting where one party has the power to shower or withhold blessings - what Newton and Findlay (1996:50) have called ‘monarchic discipline’ - is somewhat realistic in the process.

Härtel et al. (2007:342) continue their description of appraisal by noting that: A performance appraisal is an accurate measure of key aspects of employee performance, which is a crucial aspect of the performance management process if the organisation wants to improve overall organizational performance and achieve a competitive advantage.

Somewhat disconcerting is the assertion that ‘appraisal is an *accurate* measure of key aspects of employee performance’ (2007:342, emphasis added). The so-called ‘accuracy’ of performance appraisal has been a topic of much research. Latham, Suisky and
MacDonald (2007), for example, show that rating errors are virtually inevitable. In reality, the outcome of performance appraisal is frequently a decrease rather than an increase in performance because employees do not believe that appraisals are accurate, in spite of claiming ‘unbiased’ ‘straight forward’ and ‘transparency’ in the methods adopted. Rather, employees believe that they are being evaluated on the wrong footing by the wrong (untrained) people and the whole process becomes ‘un fair’ (Latham et al. 2005:77). Continuing disappointments with performance appraisal outcomes have generated a focus on the validity and reliability of measures, and attempts to negate bias in the rating process. However, this focus on the instrument and the rater has tended to marginalize research into causes of negative employee reactions to appraisal. That is, research agendas on this prescriptive approach are so focused on trying to arrive at ‘scientific’ measures of performance, while they miss the impact of such measurement processes on the ‘objects’ of their assessments.

Ratings in appraisals are notional and should therefore be used for discussion to integrate performance on a number of non-additive parameters (like adding for a sales executive his achievements of sales targets, percentage of increase in customer base, how well he has developed his juniors etc.). They cannot and should not be used to force a fit into the normal curve blindly or determine incentives mathematically. Ratings could be best used for discussions and review of performance. Ratings therefore are poison but they may be inevitable by-products of performance process. They should not be the primary pre-occupation of appraisals (T.V.Rao- Vikalpa Vol. 33, Issue 3 July- Sep 2008 )
Wood and Marshall (2008:295) recently explored factors that influence rating accuracy, and defined appraisal accuracy as ‘the primary criterion of appraisal effectiveness’. The fact that appraisers’ self-reports of appraisal effectiveness were not positively correlated with appraisee perceived effectiveness in their study was dismissed in a single sentence without critical reflection on the significance of this finding. Typical of this prescriptive stream, the assumption appears to be that as long as appraisers could have ‘self-efficacy’, their ratings would more closely approximate the ‘true scores’ obtained from expert ratings, and that could then be defined as appraisal effectiveness.

Liles (2001:144) notes that some supervisors prefer to inflate ratings because they perceive that ‘negative ratings lead to negative events such as resentment, deteriorating working relationships, appeals, grievances, and legal and industrial actions’. However, the focus of this literature is on encouraging raters to report ‘true’ performance, rather than on seriously investigating why employees react negatively to low ratings — or whether ratings should be used at all. The ‘psychometric model’ (Liles 2001:152), with its relentless pursuit of accuracy through more scientifically valid and reliable measures of individual performance, is in contrast to assumptions of the ‘political’ model of assessment (Murphy and Cleveland 1995), where it is recognized that managers have goals of their own which may not include accurate appraisals. For example, appraisal ratings may be used to punish a person perceived as a threat, or to delay the promotion of a disliked colleague. However, both the psychometric and the political models tend to ignore employee reactions to performance.

Writers in Quadrant One, despite their tendency to ignore employee responses, do admit that some employees approach appraisals with animosity (Härtel et al. 2007); in other
cases with high levels of stress (Carter and Delahaye 2005). Writers in Quadrant One, viewing employees from a managerialist perspective, acknowledge that appraisees are likely to filter the information which they volunteer in performance reviews to ensure favourable administrative decisions (Delahaye 2005). Employees may be more concerned with maximizing their rewards rather than learning from their failures during the past review period. However, while researchers in the prescriptive stream admit that there are problems with performance measurement and performance appraisals, the bulk of the research appears to be fixated on the assumption that these problems will be ‘solved through the introduction of more sophisticated performance measurement methodologies and techniques, standards and indicators’ (Vakkuri and Meklin 2006:235; Rao 2008: 10).

The prescriptive, performance-focused literature admits obvious difficulties with appraisal, but persists in trying to find solutions, rather than questioning the wisdom of appraisal per se. Much of the prescriptive HRM literature (including appraisal literature) assumes congruence between organizational and employee goals and hence a unitary view of power (Hollinshead and Leat 1995). These unitarist assumptions, when combined with a psychological ‘science’ approach to perfecting measures of performance, explain why this literature persists in its quest to find solutions to appraisal problems. The concern of researchers in this stream appears to be the need to demonstrate links between HRM and organizational performance, and the data are obtained from a range of management sources (interviews, management questionnaires and the like). Employees are left disenfranchised. In this prescriptive stream, their verdict is ignored (Grant and Shields 2002), except that negative employee reactions are problems to be ‘fixed’. In this prescriptive stream, notions of management of performance are inextricably linked with
notions of assumed employee acceptance of mutual trust, mutual respect, and command and control from above (Linstead et al. 2004). In summary, then, much of the research linking performance appraisal to organizational performance treats the employee as an object of production. Workers’ voices are rarely heard in this stream of research and their needs are certainly not regarded as central (Legge 2005). The prescriptive literature, even when it attempts to be critical of appraisal, addresses criticisms by reviewing the impact of appraisals on managers and organizational performance rather than through giving effective ‘voice’ to employees.

2.3.2 Prescriptive literature: Employee interests considered (Quadrant Two)

The prescriptive performance appraisal literature that focuses on linking appraisal to enhanced organizational performance largely ignores employees’ interests. However, employees may be elevated from ‘commodity’ status to ‘resource’ status, and hence their interests may be considered, if such consideration promotes organizational goals. Employees’ subjective experiences and needs as people are considered to certain extent by the neo-human relations approach as epitomized by McGregor (1957). He maintained that conventional performance appraisal was practically identical with a programme for product inspection. Reflecting on his unwillingness to treat human beings like physical objects, McGregor concluded on this basis that employee resistance was ‘eminently sound’ (1057:21).

McGregor (1972) proposed a change in appraisal ‘technology’ through an approach known as management-by-objectives (MBO), which he claimed would shift the emphasis
from appraisal to analysis, emphasizing performance in the future and making the subordinate the helper in the goal-setting process. However, MBO still adopted a unitarist perspective (Hollinshead et al. 2003), of fine-tuning the instrument to gain employee buy-in to organizational goals and objectives. MBO may adopt the rhetoric of mutual goals, but the objectives are more to do with meeting production targets than enriching the working lives of employees (Deery 2002). Holding isolated individuals accountable for outcomes in interdependent production systems misreads the work context. Employee reactions, again, are not the primary focus of investigations, although there are reports of the intensification of work and perceived injustices under the MBO system (Green and McIntosh 1998). Levinson’s (1970:125, emphasis on original) question nicely captures the lack of employee-centered focus in MBO, despite the rhetoric: ‘Management by whose objectives? A growing dissatisfaction with the failure of MBO to deliver clearly demonstrable improved organizational performance, given the inevitable clash between organizational and personal goals (Keenoy and Kelly 2001), and especially given the neglect of systems factors which influence performance, led to a movement against performance appraisal. More than two decades ago Deming (1986), one of the key persons in the total quality management (TQM) movement, listed the annual evaluation of performance or merit rating as one of the seven ‘deadly diseases’ of management. Rather than management by objectives, he contended that it was ‘management by fear’. The effects of an annual rating from a superior, as articulated by Deming (1986:102), sound remarkably familiar to reports from employees of the organizations under study today: ‘It nourishes short-term performance, annihilates long-term planning, builds fear,
demolishes team-work, nourishes rivalry and politics. It leaves people bitter, crushed, bruised, battered, desolate, despondent, dejected, feeling inferior, some even depressed, unfit for work for weeks after receipt of rating, unable to comprehend why they are inferior. It is unfair, as it ascribes to the people in a group differences that may be caused totally by the peculiar system that they are accustomed to work in.’

‘While Deming flagged the issue of the subjective impact of appraisal on workers (‘leaves people. . .feeling inferior’), few researchers seriously continued in this line of enquiry until a recent resurgence in interest in emotions in the workplace emerged out (Ashkanasy et al. 2000; Fineman 2003). Deming’s writings, while against the performance of appraisals, fit into Quadrant Two in that, they reveal part of the natural history of the development of appraisal ideas, and also because of the appeal to managers to consider the impact of appraisal upon employees. Deming’s approach, while systems focused, raises the question of the (unintended) consequences of appraisal on employees, a key feature of literature in Quadrant Two. His criticism of appraisal was a helpful bridge to the critical stream of literature which will be examined in Quadrants Three and Four.

Proponents of TQM allege that appraisal, with its focus on blaming the employee rather than addressing the context of work, focuses on individual components rather than focusing on the leadership required to manage organizational systems (Jones 1995; Storey 2001). Appraisal therefore becomes management of defects. Employees and organizations are both losers in the process. The performance review, no matter how well designed the format, is a one-way street. Employees, however, quickly spot the flaws in appraisal. According to Crosby (1995:16) the reviews, which are supposed to give
information to management about employees, do the reverse. The employees quickly realize that management has no way of knowing who is the fairest of them all, except through luck and instincts.

The little empirical research that has been done in the prescriptive, but employee-focused, literature (that is, Quadrant Two) thus far has examined employee reactions in services or staff positions, Brown and Benson (2003), Guest (1999), and Taylor and Pierce (1999). Surveys regarding appraisal have also been conducted on managers and students attending MBA courses (Carson et al. 1991). Lynch et al. (1999) surveyed retail employees regarding perceived organizational support; employees considered how much the organization valued their contributions and cared about their well-being, on the basis of appraisal experiences. One of the more significant findings of a meta-analytic study of performance appraisal (Cawley et al. 1998: 615) was that employees were more positive towards ‘participation for the sake of having one’s “voice” heard’ than ‘participation for the purpose of influencing the end result’ (1998:615). In another study attempting to assess HRM functions from an employee perspective, Gibb (2001) found that performance appraisal rated lowest of 14 items when employees were asked to rate the effectiveness of HR practices.

In summary, Quadrant Two literature — what Legge (2001) considers to be positivist, modernist and employee focused — shares common, unitarist assumptions about employees being ‘resources’ to be developed for the effective attainment of organizational goals. A common thread of neo-human relations, MBO, and TQM approaches is the attainment of high performance through employee commitment to
company goals. In the first two of these movements, performance appraisal is seen as a ‘tool’ kept in the managerial ‘toolkit’ towards productivity ends, while in the TQM approach, appraisal is seen as a ‘disease’ in the system to be abolished because of its negative effects on employee morale. The literature represented in Quadrants One and Two — the prescriptive, functionalist and uncritical literature — suggests that appraisals have become part of the ‘received doctrine’ (Carson et al. 1991) of an auditing culture (Bach 2000). Despite the deficiencies of performance appraisal, literature in Quadrants One and Two view performance appraisal as a power-neutral technique. However, since individuals may lack control over their work environments and other factors influencing performance, appraisals may appear (especially to employees) to be arbitrary and unfair (Iles 2001). The emphasis and assumptions of performance appraisal mirror past trends in management, especially the Taylor’s approach to division of labour and measurement of the individual’s performance. The prescriptive stream continues to the present day in texts where discussions of rater error (such as halo effect, horns effect, leniency, central tendency and so forth) and instrument type (behaviorally anchored rating scales, behaviour observation scales, 360 degree appraisals, peer evaluations, MBO and so on) continue to dominate the discussion of how to improve the effectiveness of appraisal. While researchers in this stream may display a passing interest in employee responses to HRM initiatives, the focus is on increasing labour productivity, and not on appraisal’s subjective impact on employees.
2.3.3 Critical literature: De-centred employee perspectives (Quadrant Three)

An alternative perspective to the managerialist approach of the prescriptive literature, stemming from critical theory and sociology (Iles 2001), identifies the controlling and potentially subjugating effects of appraisal on appraisees. An argument for taking a critical analytical approach to management activities, as opposed to a prescriptive, functionalist and normative one, was advanced by Legge (1978) many years ago. Critical theory in organization studies has developed from a number of philosophical and sociological approaches (Bohm 2007). However, two broad categories are generally described in the literature. The first, usually described as Marxist or neo-Marxist and influenced by Frankfurt School scholars such as Adorno (1973), Fromm (1994) and Horkheiiner (1979), and later by Habermas (1984), emphasizes the ‘antagonisms of society’ (BOIUU 2007:109). These scholars see power as embedded in specific societal and political structures. Critical approaches, in this tradition, ‘provide systematic critiques of capitalist forms of exploitation and the various economic, political and cultural processes through which the ideas of the ruling class are produced and reproduced’ (Mumby 2004:237). Labour process theory draws some of its intellectual roots emanated and sprout from this tradition (Thompson 1990). The second approach, following Foucault, moves away from views of power as something possessed, as ‘property by persons, a dominant class, a sovereign or a state’ (Knights and Willmott 1989:553). Rather, ‘forms of power are exercised through subjecting individuals to their own identity or subjectivity, and are not therefore mechanisms directly derived from the forces of production, class struggle or ideological
structures’ (Knights and Willrnott 1989:553). This second approach has been referred to as post-structuralist approach. While these two approaches have often been characterized as ideologically separate, a number of writers (see, for example, Mumby 2004:239) see the boundaries at times as ‘porous’. Bohm (2007:109) takes exception to the general framework which distinguishes between the Frankfurt School scholars and those who follow Foucault’s conceptions of power relations and struggles, contending that:

Perhaps there are not so many dividing boundaries between Frankfurt and Paris, between ‘CT’ [Critical Theory] and ‘PS’ [post-structuralism]. If [scholars] would look beyond their acronyms for critical theory and post structuralism, that is, if they would read the multiple and diverse texts produced by scholars associated with these philosophical categories, they would notice that there are many connecting lines between these German outlooks and French philosophical traditional outlooks.

There has been a growing interest in studying various critical approaches under the banner of ‘critical management studies’ (Fournier and Grey 2000; Aivesson and Willrnott 2003). Critical management studies (CMS), drawing on disparate political, institutional and epistemological trends, is ‘unified by an anti - performative stance, and a commitment to (some form of) denaturalization and reflexivity’ (Fournier and Grey 2000:7). That is, writers in the critical management studies tradition are concerned with ‘performativity’ only insofar as it uncovers power, control and inequality issues being done in the name of performance. In the CMS approach, appraisal in any of its forms is viewed as yet another managerial device through which to gain greater control over, and therefore extract greater effort from employees (Elvira and Town 2001; Coates 2004). Newton and Findlay (1996), for example, see little point in analysing appraisal outside
the context in which it operates and without reference to power relations within the organization (for example, workforce composition) and without (for example, sectoral and ownership factors). For them, appraisal schemes are predominantly concerned with surveillance, accountability and control, and legitimating management roles in the organizational hierarchy. Appraisal appears to have less to do with performance management per se and more to do with legitimizing management decision making aided and abetted by its seeming fairness and objectivity. (Newton and Findlay 1996:47) Critical studies of appraisal have drawn heavily on the work of Foucault. Appraisal, in this tradition, has been re-examined in the light of Foucault’s ideas on disciplinary practices or ‘techniques to manage people en masse’ (Legge 2005:343). Foucault identified three ways in which individuals could be located conceptually in time and space: enclosure, partitioning and ranking (Foucault 1977). While all three of these processes are involved in appraisal, ranking - the hierarchical ordering of individuals, done through processes of examination - acts most obviously as a disciplinary device and is most pertinent to the notion of appraisal, due to its subjectivity: [T]he distribution according to ranks or grades has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchies in qualities, skills and aptitudes but it also punishes and rewards. (Foucault 1977:181). Knights has identified three periods in Foucault’s work, of which the ‘middle phase’ is most directly relevant to appraisal (Knights, 2002:581). During this time, Foucault focused on power and discipline within organizations such as schools, prisons and factories. Foucault (1980; 1982) claims that modern regimes of power/knowledge transform individuals into subjects who turn in on themselves and become self-regarding, self-governing, and self-disciplining. Foucault’s conceptualizations of power and
knowledge (or power/knowledge), especially his depiction of the examination which *constitutes* the individual as an object of knowledge through scientific study and confession, has direct relevance to performance appraisal. Foucault (1977) contends that organizations are engaged in defining individuals, and such definitions are not power-neutral. Categorizations such as performance appraisal entail a discourse of ‘knowing’ the individual, and as such they exercise power over the individual. Power, in this sense, is constitutive in that it creates individuals as known objects (Foucault 1982) and renders them manageable, rewardable, and punishable (Dii Gay 1997). Foucault’s best known example of the examination is Jeremy Bentham’s *panopticon* penitentiary (Foucault 1977), where prisoners were enclosed and partitioned in such a way that their constant sense of being watched by unseen eyes meant that their oily rational option was continuous obedience. Foucault observed that the panopticon led to a situation where the prisoners’ constant sense of being watched by the warden led to a state where prisoners *disciplined themselves*. The concept of panopticon-like surveillance, raises obvious parallels with appraisal as a form of managerial discipline and control where performance measures, appraisal observations, and rewards and punishment for observed behaviour act as a constant source of power/knowledge aimed at influencing employee conduct.

In addition to the notion of examination, Foucault (1981) sees the confessional as a process through which the person is constituted as a subject. Performance appraisal can be seen as a confessional process in which workers must articulate their strengths, weaknesses and failures to a ‘priest-like’ master and accept the ‘truths’ of the ‘priest’ who judges and defines the subject in return. The confessional — the individual’s acknowledgement of his or her thoughts or actions — ‘yields further knowledge to assist
in the managerial implicative process of governance’ (Legge 2005:345).
The truth did not reside solely in the subject who by confessing, would reveal it wholly formed. It was constituted in two stages: present but incomplete, blind to itself, in the one who spoke, it could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it. . . The one who listened. . .was the master of truth. . .With regard to the confession, his power was not only to demand it before it was made, or decide what was to follow after it, but also to constitute a discourse of truth on the basis of its decipherment. (Foucault 1981:87)

Drawing on the work of Foucault, critical postmodernist scholars, (for example Townley 1989; Townley 1993; 1994; Townley 1997; Townley 1999), question the conceptualization of appraisal found in the prescriptive literature. Appraisal, from the critical perspective, is part of a discourse which ‘serves to render organizations and their participants calculable arenas, offering, through a variety of technologies [including appraisal], the means by which activities and individuals become knowable and governable’ (Townley 1993:526). Scholars in this tradition see an essential contradiction between HRM practices such as appraisal, supposedly designed to create high commitment but at the same time strengthening managerial prerogative. Truss et al. (1997) argue that even if the rhetoric of HRM is ‘soft’ [the humanistic Harvard emphasis in managing people (Beer et al. 1985)], the reality is almost always ‘hard’ [the Michigan emphasis (Tichy et al. 1982) on business values and the calculative using of employees as tools through which to achieve organizational ends], with the interests of management prevailing over those of the individual. Watson (2004:455) goes further. He discredits the ‘hard-soft’ dichotomy. Not only does it ignore the political-economic context of
managerial practices, but it also naively implies that a ‘soft-soft’ approach (applying developmental and indirect controls to serve employee interests) is possible in practice, which, he says, is not true. There may be irreconcilable differences between the espoused values of management and the lived experiences of employees. In the critical tradition, performance appraisal is seen as something done to employees; not something done for them.

Rose captures a central theme of Foucauldian writers, who view HRM practices as a new set of disciplinary techniques. The twentieth century, according to Rose (1990:95) witnessed the psychologisation of work, providing managers with ‘a vocabulary and a technology for rendering the labour of the employees visible, calculable, and manageable.’ In the confessional (Townley 1994), the subject is compelled to disclose fine and intimate details of their personal and interpersonal (relationships-with-others) selves, thus being subjected to surveillance and scrutiny, normative evaluation and correction. This view of appraisal as a means of getting employees to confess and to persuade them to identify with their organization rests on the argument that appraisal is a means of involving individuals in their own subordination (Coates, 2004). Management attempts to create a new identity — the compliant, committed employee — through the confessional. Here, employees ‘by their own means or with the help of others, acted on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and the way of being in order to transform themselves’ (Martin et al. 1988:4). This transformation creates a new employee-as-object, or a subjugated employee. Together, the processes of examination and confession can give rise to the individual acting out a self-disciplining and ‘socially constructed performance’ (Legge- 2005-345).
Appraisal, in the critical literature, is not primarily concerned with measuring performance, but rather with conveying management’s performance expectations so that employees will internalize the controls (Townley 1989). Townley (1999) sees appraisals being used to privilege the power of those who articulate the dominant discourse, that discourse being used to manipulate and construct others. While non Foucauldian scholars, such as Hancock and Tyler (2001) and Strange (2002), view appraisal as a means to persuade employees to identify with their organizations, Foucauldian writers see appraisal as a means of involving employees in their own subordination (Coates 2004).

What is largely missing from the Foucauldian critical literature, however, is a strong sense of worker agency. While management may attempt to ‘construct’ the employee, the scope and depth of management control can be seriously overstated. The ‘selective appropriation’ (Knights 2002:582) of Foucault by some critical management researchers results in a de-centering of the subject (who, they say, is constituted by discourse) and ‘ironising’ accounts of what employees suggest. For example, Ball and Wilson (2000) take snippets of text, in which employees are told about their attitudes to appraisal (even when they are criticizing it) and argue that such employees’ opposition merely show their subordination to the discourse of ‘empowerment’ or ‘legitimate authority’:

Individuals positioned themselves in the ‘empowerment’ and ‘legitimate authority’ repertoires because of their own process of subjectification to these and other institutional discourses or discussions within a group of individuals. (Ball and Wilson 2000:561)

Thus, even as they criticize the manager’s competence to rate their performance, workers (according to Ball and Wilson) are actually confirming their ‘subjectification’ to this
discourse. This apparent conundrum is what Newton refers to as a ‘Catch-22’ (Newton 1998:424) in the argument by some Foucauldians that the salience and power of particular discourses is revealed as much by their denial, resistance or non-acceptance as by their acceptance. Similar arguments ascribe ‘false consciousness’ to workers who think they have the freedom to resist the subjugating discourses of management. Indeed, a frequent theme in the critical literature is that employees through resistance can potentially reproduce the very power relations they seek to escape (Fleming and Spicer 2003).

The assumption that workers are subjugated by managerial discourses has led, as Thompson and Ackroyd (1995:625) point out, to an almost complete absence of actual accounts of resistance in Foucauldian studies — a shift in theoretical focus from concern with labour to a concern with identity/security needs to the extent that ‘the labour process is just part of the scenery’ (1995:627). Indeed Thompson and Ackroyd describe the marginalization in Foucauldian studies of the possibility of workplace resistance as ‘the disappearing resistance trick’ (1995:622). Elsewhere, Newton (1998) has criticized Foucauldian writers such as Knights, Willmott and Townley for the way in which their work represses the subject. Human agency gets marginalized (or is framed in images of passivity) in their constitution of the subject through discourse. The Foucauldian idea of the (self) disciplined, docile employee, who wants ‘on his or her own what the organisation wants’ (Deetz 1992:42) has led to a de-centering of the employee in Foucauldian inspired critical management studies (Carter et al. 2002). As McKinlay and Taylor assert: So seductive is Foucault’s panopticon metaphor, however, that if simply transposed on to the labour process perspective it can seriously overestimate the scope
and depth of management control. . . The image in these accounts is a form of self-subordination so complete, so seamless that it stifles any dissent, however innocuous. (McKinlay and Taylor- 2006:228). By contrast, this thesis seeks to avoid a totalizing position of discourse-domination of the subject. Rather it seeks to ‘re-centre’ the ‘missing’ subject (Grant and Shields 2002:313), and will take seriously what employees say during the performance appraisal conducted under a conflict creating situation within the group, *inter alia* through fine-grained narrative analysis. The thesis will investigate to what degree employees seek avenues of resistance to defend themselves in conflict situation, by creating and generating new ideas for performance improvement. How and why group conflict strategies are brought into play in the appraisal process to generate more newly developed and formulated ideas which also will be investigated.

In the Foucauldian studies of appraisal (for example, Townley, 1994; 1999) employees lack a clear sense of agency. Most Foucauldian writers take a similar view of appraisal but Austrin (1994:205) provides an exception in noting that employees in his study were able to resist by developing different positions from which to speak. Collinson (1994:52) argues, ‘a common problem with a great deal of the current critical literature on employee behaviour is its failure to address adequately the way in which power relations are subjectively experienced’ [emphasis in original]. It is to this small but significant body of literature, which serves as the base for this thesis, that we now turn in Quadrant Four.

### 2.3.4 Critical literature: *Employee-centered perspectives (Quadrant Four)*

Legge (2005:41) argues that ‘the submerged voice of those who experience HRM
initiatives needs to be given more prominence, not only for ethical reasons, but also to counteract the managerialist agendas that are implicit in much HRM and performance research’. Rosenthal (2004:602, emphasis in original) expresses a similar view: What is largely missing in contemporary critical analyses...are thoroughgoing, workplace level accounts of how employees experience and evaluate regulation in relation to their self-defined interests — research, in other words, that takes more account of employee experience of workplace dynamics and does not so quickly de-centre or dismiss this experience in terms such as discursive colonization, false consciousness or obsessional neurosis.

This thesis takes the view, in agreement with Alvesson and Willmott (2002:621), that ‘organizational members are not reducible to passive consumers of managerially designed and designated identities’. This is an important notion, given the decentering of the subject in Foucault’s earlier work. Newton argues convincingly that some Foucauldian studies have neglected to explain ‘active agential subjects who maneuver and “play” with discourse and practice in the context of power relations which are asymmetrical in character’ (1998:428, emphasis in original). It is Newton’s contention that unless we understand how people agentially ‘play’ with, resist, ignore, or subvert discursive practices, we will merely see persons in terms of their ‘constitution’ as subjects of power/knowledge discourses in local power relations, rather than as agential actors. Following this vein, Gabriel (1999) challenges what he sees as the tendency to overplay the uniformity and totality of control in Foucault-inspired research in organizations and calls for the rediscovery of human agency in critical research. He contests the magnitude and totality of constitutive control suggested in the earlier
writings of Foucault and suggests that ‘human agency can be rediscovered as a struggling, feeling, thinking, suffering subject’ (Gabriel 1999:179). A small but growing body of employee-centered HRM literature attempts to ‘re-center’ the employee, not as a managerial object, but as a discursive subject capable of agency through the creation of more-or-less stable narrative identities, and their defense through discursive resistance. However, these freedoms are not limitless; to a significant extent of structural constraints still exist — there must be room both for structure and social agency (Rosenthal 2004). What ‘discursive resources’ (Watson 1995:14) the subject brings into service to resist employer attempts at subjugation is an important field of investigation.

Numerous academics have been calling for more empirical research to understand how employees, as active agents react to management practices in different contexts (for example, Truss 2001; Brown and Benson 2003; Watson 2004). Jermier et al., (1994:xv) observe that ‘both oppressive and subtly dominating practices at work can be met with powerful countervailing powers,’ and then they point to the necessity of ‘examining both subtle and subterranean forms of subversion and sabotage as well as the more overt forms of defiance and protest.’ They also make it clear that the interpretations provided by theorists and researchers will be more informed when they take account of the ‘meanings that those who resist give to their own practices’ [emphasis added]. This thesis is firmly positioned in Quadrant Four where the employee qua agential subject is re-centered as the focus of investigation. How employees make sense of appraisal, and maintain their ‘selves’ in the face of a new practice in the group which targets self-identity through attempts at self-discipline or internal control, is a neglected but important topic. This
thesis will build upon an emerging body of employee-centered literature on the new model of appraisal. For example, McKinlay and Taylor (1996) explored employee resistance strategies to the imposition of team-based peer performance ratings on production lines in a factory floor. Their work demonstrates that the power of HRM techniques to nullify or prevent employee resistance has been greatly exaggerated. They demonstrate how employees were able to turn a tight self-policing internal regime into one through which to protect the team from external (managerial) intrusions. Evidence of inventive agency in the McKinlay and Taylor study indicates that shop-floor workers were able to use key elements of the team-working ideology and the practices of management while at the same time rendering the disciplinary effects of team-based appraisal inoperable. McKinlay and Taylor (1996:282) thus contend that Foucauldian images of self-subordination so complete, and the control function so effectively dispersed, that ‘the only expression of workers’ collectivity is to intensify their levels of mutual subjugation’ seriously overestimate the scope and depth of managerial control.

An employee-centered perspective is also evident in the work by Glover and Noon (2005) who explored how quality management initiatives (not HRM practices *per se*) directly affect shop-floor workers. Through analysis of employee experiences of TQM initiatives in two case-studies in different organizations, they stress the importance of understanding the social context in which employee responses emerge. While they conclude that worker experiences tend to be locally situated, they also note the social agency of their subjects and accept the actors’ own definitions of the situations in which they are engaged. Edwards et al. (1998) also focus on employee accounts of TQM, with results indicating a simultaneous mix of gains, losses and tensions for employees. The
same employee-centered approach to strategy and TQM practices that we see in Glover and Noon’s (2005) work, and the work of Edwards et al. (1998), can also be applied to performance appraisal. However, unlike the aforementioned studies, this thesis takes an approach that uses identity theory to privilege the employee as an active, agential social being, who is capable of generating more ideas in a group conflict situation than in a normal work situation for betterment of his performance in consultation with his group members.

Another noteworthy exception to the general neglect of employee-centered approaches to organizational studies is work by Ackroyd and Thompson whose focus is on ‘what ordinary employees do at work’ (1999:2). Their work questions the notion of employee subjugation in the workplace; indeed, their work highlights the role of human agency in generating resistance and ‘mis-behaviour’ based on the extent to which employees identify (or dis-identify) with their work and their employers. Other examples of employee-centered research include Collinson’s (1992) study of resistance on the shop-floor in two factories in the UK, and Ackroyd and Crowdy’s (1990) study of worker resistance strategies in an English slaughterhouse. In all of these cases, empirical evidence refutes totalizing concepts of worker subjugation. Workers find ways to open spaces for identity restoring practices even in the most controlled working environments. In another noteworthy exception to the exclusion of worker concerns, Grant et al. (2003) explored assumptions of performance appraisal in the Australian Public Service, using a discursive framework of analysis which relates to the Quadrant Four literature is their investigation of the responses of employees affected by appraisal, notably its effects on staff self-image, commitment and motivation. A key finding is that individuals
participating in a discourse such as appraisal do so, not as passive receptacles but as ‘active social agents with their own interests and subjectivities who are seeking to establish what their social and power relations are with the designated discursive objects’ (Grant et.al 2003: 249).

To summarize, the employee-centered critical literature claims that we know relatively little about the impact of HRM initiatives on employees’ individual and collective experience, expectations and aspirations (Grant and Shields 2002). There is a paucity of research that takes seriously (in a non-ironising way) employee responses to being performance rated. One strand of the emerging body of employee-centered literature harks back to the occupational sociology of Everett Hughes who asserted that an employee’s work is one of the things by which he or she is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he or she judges him or her self (Hughes 1994:57). Responding to Hughes’ (1994:61) call to ‘penetrate more deeply into the personal and social drama of work, to understand the social and social-psychological arrangements and devices by which men make their work tolerable, or even make it glorious to themselves and others’, this thesis undertakes a focused investigation of the reactions of employees to performance appraisal. Conceptually, appraisal of the individual (a highly individuating process) cuts deeply across what Hughes calls the ‘social-psychological entanglements’ of established and entrenched work relationships, especially where the job requires a high degree of interpersonal cooperation, communication and trust in each other’s competences in dangerous or even life-threatening conditions. Drawing together these strands from the literature, this thesis maintains that the individuating practice of appraisal clashes with the social order of work relationships in organisations.
Given the paucity of research into employee responses in both the prescriptive and the critical literature, this investigation into employee reactions recognizes the need for a critical social scientific approach. This thesis therefore uses conceptual contributions from a range of critical management studies, and the conceptual models developed in the next chapters. One of the contributions of this thesis is its willingness to investigate frameworks from different disciplinary traditions of the social sciences and integrate them to enrich conceptual understandings of performance appraisal’s effects. In this process, the emerging understanding of employees as they are impacted by, react to, and responded upon HRM processes and functions will better inform theory refinement and development. Specifically, as will now be developed in Chapter 3, the thesis seeks to understand what the literature says about how worker identity is constructed, disrupted by managerial practices (brain storming under conflict situation), and subsequently repaired in a synectics.

2.4 Conclusion: The subjective effects of appraisal

This chapter has reviewed two key streams of literature (subdivided into four quadrants) which represent differing perspectives and assumptions with respect to the appraisal of employee performance. The prescriptive appraisal literature pays scant attention to employees’ wants and needs, adopting a managerialist, normative and utilitarian approach towards maximizing efficiency, holding employees accountable to various targets typically set by management, although these targets are often assumed (by management) to be ‘mutually agreed’. The critical stream identifies power and control issues ignored by much of the managerialist literature, but puts more emphasis on the
subjugating effects of appraisal on the individual rather than on the capacity of the employee to resist or to use appraisal for his or her own purposes or benefits. Both the prescriptive and the critical streams, therefore, have a propensity to deprive the employee of agency. A critical social science approach, as depicted in Quadrant Four above, offers the potential for useful insights into how employees respond to being performance appraised. This approach seeks to re-centre the employee as an actor in this process. This thesis recognizes the need to ‘develop more nuanced and employee-centered constructs for understanding [employee] reactions’ to HRM techniques like appraisal (Grant and Shields 2002:329). To achieve this understanding, this thesis focuses on occupational identity disruption (conflict) and repair (synectics) thereby making a significant contribution to understanding the effects of appraisal on employee subjectivity. In particular, it contributes towards an analysis of how employees’ negative reactions to appraisal stem from their ‘historically and culturally conditioned sense of self-identity (Ezzamel and Willniott 1998:365).