

research and encourage the scientists working in the region to see themselves as part of the world wide effort to overcome the problems of the semi-arid tropics. Are these objectives achieved? There is certainly an extensive review of the current state of research in the region, which can only assist the attainment of the first two objectives. Whether those already working in the field will learn anything about their own specialised interests is another question. Many of the papers emphasise the differences (especially in population density and the availability of capital) between North West Australia and semi-arid tropical areas in other parts of the world, so the attainment of the third objective is dubious.

Thus this book will appeal most to scientists and agriculturalists who are new to North West Australia, and want to know the story so far. Given the difficulties experienced by many research organisations in retaining staff in the region (Henzell's paper contains the story of one who lasted less than a day), this may produce considerable sales.

**Paul Brassley**  
Seale-Hayne College  
Devon

**Marginal Manager — The Changing Role of Supervisors in Australia** by Peter Gilmour and Russell Lansbury  
(University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Qld., 1984) pp. xii + 179,  
ISBN 0 7022 1686 0.

Robotics, automation, information and communication technologies are forcing structural change on Australian manufacturing industries. This book reviews and analyses a key aspect of the implementation of such change — the role of the first-line manager.

The authors presumably chose the title from their reference to the 1949 American abstract of D.E. Bray's work, *Marginal Men of Industry: The Foreman*. Reading this abstract, one is left wondering just how much change there has been in the intervening thirty-five years. Bray in 1949, and Gilmour and Lansbury in 1984 each talk of the supervisor or first-line manager's 'man in the middle' role and the personal conflict and disruption to managerial organisation that this can produce unless properly understood and managed. Both works also cover the three roles of the first-line manager; supervising subordinates, linking with other management and resolving technical problems.

From that perspective this book is indeed timely because if there has not been much change in the last thirty-five years, there will surely be in the next. Increasing demands for some form of industrial democracy and the accelerating impact of automation and technology in the workplace are just two of the many significant pressures that will change the first-line manager's role.

It is made abundantly clear by the authors that as Australian industry adapts to these pressures, no standard solution in terms of the role of first-line managers will be available as this vitally important industrial role is not executed by a homogenised group within the workforce. The authors identify

three age groups from their survey and two very distinct aspirational characteristics or career-orientations of first-line managers. The latter is of key importance in applying the lessons from the authors' survey and case studies to other situations. There is the first-line manager who has come up through the ranks from the shop-floor and who sees the position as a career peak. The other is a younger, more educationally qualified, first-line manager who sees the position as a stepping stone to higher management positions.

*Marginal Manager* covers only supervisors in the mining and manufacturing industries. Sixty per cent of the book is devoted to eight case studies, two from Australian mining companies, three from Australian manufacturing industry, one from an Australian car manufacturer and two from overseas car manufacturers. Although the book is sub-titled *The Changing Role of Supervisors in Australia*, the two overseas case studies are more than welcome. One is the famous Volvo study at their Kalmar plant in Sweden and the other a General Motors plant in the United States. The latter is compared and contrasted with a similar study of the General Motors-Holden plant in South Australia.

This case study section of the book is not categorised by industry type but by the model used or approach taken to the introduction of change in the specific study. Four approaches or models are listed: Human Resources, Group Organisational Development; Group Technology and Socio-Technical Systems. In each study the background is given so that the motivation for the change can be understood. Details are supplied as to implementation time-scales and methodologies, and achievements against initial objectives are listed. The achievements tend to be restricted to productivity improvements, reduction in absenteeism and/or turnover, and similar bottom-line oriented goals.

The first part of the book, about twenty-five per cent of the total, is devoted to a historical review of the first-line manager's role, together with some prognostications for alternative future scenarios. A survey relating to supervisory-level education in Australia is documented and analysed and suggestions are made for improving supervisor quality. This first section also provides a useful literature review, particularly if the extensive notations are pursued.

The concluding chapter of the book attempts to pull the work together and analyse its impact in terms of organisational change. It is here that readers of *Prometheus* may see the direct relevance of such a book to their interest. The impact of technological change and the emerging information economy on the structure of Australian industry is becoming both more widespread and more profound. Understanding the role of the first-line manager in such restructuring is clearly a pre-requisite for successful implementation of change. This book is both timely and relevant to Australia's industrial development and should prove of particular interest to personnel managers involved in implementing structural change, overseas researchers interested in obtaining some comparative case study material and educational needs data on Australian supervisors, those wanting to review the literature in this area and overview some Australian case studies.

**Peter Graham**  
Griffith University