BUILDING AND MAINTAINING CAPACITY
IN A
COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANISATION

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I declare that this work is my own and that no part of it has been submitted for a degree
or other qualification to any university or other institution of learning. The thesis contains
no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference
is made and acknowledged.

Jean-Luc Revel

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Jean-Luc Revel
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The decision to select action research and a community service organisation for my project was a personal choice motivated by curiosity and interest. However, my thesis supervisor Dr Murray Redman who suggested a less conventional research path also influenced that choice. He did so by highlighting the deep learning opportunities that would be available, to me and other project participants, as a result of applying an action research approach to the issue faced by the organisation. His guidance, patience, and Socratic Method of teaching by asking questions that will prompt reflection has been an inspiration to the novice I was when my journey began.

My children Luc and Alix were a constant source of support and encouragement, they kept my determination to succeed alive when the demand of work and life in general caused me to question my ability to balance all of the competing demands placed on my time.

The Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua, both its Board and members were very generous in contributing their time to the action research journey. Without their willingness to fully engage and participate in the action research process, the journey would not have been possible or as beneficial. It is that personal engagement that made the experience so rewarding since it contributed to knowledge being gained and shared between the researcher and club members.

My research journey has also reinforced my belief that community service organisations, such as the Rotary club involved, make a significant contribution to society. I would like to acknowledge that contribution and sincerely hope the research project can assist in building and maintaining the capacity they need to effectively serve the community.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father

Jean Revel

1924-2006

Son example est mon inspiration
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Community service organisations perform an increasingly important role due to an expectation by governments that local communities are to achieve a greater level of self-sufficiency in meeting many of their social needs. Ironically, that increasing dependence on community service organisations filling in the gap is occurring at a time when their membership level is decreasing. The result is a reduction their capacity at a time of increased community needs and expectations.

The community service organisation chosen for this research project is a Rotary club facing a serious loss of human resources capacity. The methodology selected drew from different approaches identified with qualitative research, process consulting, action research, action learning and grounded theory.

Rotary draws its members from business leaders and professionals who are expected to demonstrate problem-solving skills in their occupations and professions. Such a group of people would be expected to apply their business and professional experience to the operation of their community service organisation. However this is currently not the case and why this is so is an important question to ask on behalf of the club and its members.

The research aims is to contribute to the available knowledge concerning capacity building in community service organisations and in particular the Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua. Importantly, the action component of the research led to members of the Rotary club building experience in the application of a collaborative approach to address problems and implement change. The club and its members have combined their learning experience to develop their individual and collective capability.

On a personal level, the action and learning associated with the research has improved in my practice in the field of organisation development. As the research journey unfolded and my involvement grew, the reflective process I engaged in caused me to examine my values and attitudes. It has left me better equipped to understand the impact that individual assumptions about truth, reality and knowledge have on addressing organizational issues.
CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROJECT
Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce:

- The purpose of the project.
- The position of the researcher.
- The organisation, the problem, and the research question.
- Provide an outline of the overall thesis’s structure.

Purpose of the project

The purpose of this action research project is to assist a community service organisation build and maintain its capacity. To do so the organisation has to develop the means to more effectively manage an uncertain and changing environment. This is a real life issue for the organisation due to governments retreating to core business and expecting non government organisations and the community to have a greater involvement in managing the rest (Beilharz quoted in Lovell et al. 1995; McGregor-Lowndes & Ryan 2009).

The project is also interested in examining if there is a noticeable change in people’s approach to organisational issues when in paid employment as opposed to members of a community service organisation.

The community service organisation selected for this research project is a Rotary club whose membership is drawn from business leaders and professionals. In such an organisation it could be expected that members who are successful in their occupational and professional life would apply their skills, knowledge and experience to benefit the operation of their club.
Three main objectives are identified with the research:

- to draw from an action research approach to observe how the chosen community service organisation manages its operational problems
- to leverage on the action component of the research and learn how to address similar problems in the future: this use of action to learn new skills is expected to benefit all participants, including the researcher
- to obtain data that will contribute to the development of local theory leading to and informing the action taken by the organisation and its members: this is intended to assist the organisation in developing the strategies needed to meet the challenges of its changing environment

A significant measure of effectiveness for a community service organisation is to be acknowledged as performing a relevant role within the society in which it operates. This recognition is necessary if the organisation is to attract the human and financial resources it requires to achieve its stated objectives. Of those resources, however, the organisation’s human capital is the most important since it is volunteer labour that drives community service organisations (Wilson & Pimm 1996). Unfortunately in a society overwhelmed by personal preoccupations, citizens are less and less prepared to donate their time unless they receive something tangible in exchange. What people perceive of benefit, however, is likely to be assessed using different criteria depending on the individuals' concerned (Sherer 2004; Wilson & Pimm 1996). For example, some will expect some personal benefits in return for their contribution, whilst others will be driven by more altruistic intentions (Ziemek 2005). In this climate, community service organisations have to offer a number of benefits to their members and communicate those clearly in order to attract and retain people (MacNeela 2008). They must also continually reassess themselves in order to remain relevant in a rapidly changing society. This would include being able to identify what motivate people who are time poor and struggling to balance the competing demands of modern life.
As part of the research two major aspects of membership are examined in the context of club capacity:

- recruitment of new members,
- retention of existing members

**Position of the researcher**

I entered the research in the position of an insider working in collaboration with other insiders (*Herr & Anderson 2005; Neuman 2006*). When the research began, I had been a long serving member of the Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua as well as having been a member of other Rotary clubs. As a Rotarian of 25 years, I have held Board positions including the role of President, a number of times. In my professional life I am a middle manager with over 30 years experience mostly in the public sector and for the last 14 years I have also been a mature student. Working in collaboration with others is a situation I find attractive. It is also conducive to rewarding outcomes for all who are prepared to become genuinely involved in the process.

The attraction of embarking on an action research journey with my Rotary club included working on a significant organisational issue with people in the voluntary sector. I also welcomed the opportunity to practice research in an environment that is different from that of my work and would add to the learning experience. Another reason for selecting my Rotary club is the paucity of material available on capacity building for an organisation made up of volunteers from the world of business and professions. Whilst the issue of membership is very real, and Rotary provides information and advice on how to recruit members and build club capacity, there is no practical account regarding its implementation in the field.

As a result and on a more personal level, the research project offered a number of objectives and opportunities such as:

- developing my practice in the field of organisational development;
- assisting a service organisation I care for, to resolve a crucial problem;
• contributing to the development of local theory that will lead and inform the actions taken by my fellow club members as participants in the action research project

Writing this thesis also represents a significant milestone in my life as it occurs at a time when I can reflect on a long career in management. It also takes place after many years of studying management and public administration. As a mature student I have been able to draw from theory to deduct suitable measures to address issues at work. When the time came to adopt a research method, the opportunity to experience action research was attractive from a number of perspectives related to organisational development and management.

• The natural flow from action to theory grounded in the data collected as part of the research. Experiencing and relying on induction as opposed to deducting from existing theory would require a paradigm shift on my part and represent a personal challenge.

• The opportunity to investigate the behaviour of business leaders and professionals facing operational problems in the context of a community service organisation. I believe that many of the models adopted by successful businesses can be transferred across to benefit the operation of community service organisations. Among those is the application of a disciplined approach to conducting the business of the organisation. The previous situation in which those organisations did not have to unduly compete with other institutions for human and financial resources no longer applies (Millette & Gagnè 2008). In the current climate, their capacity will only be built and maintained by developing strategies that will motivate prospective members to join and position the organisation ahead of other interests competing for people’s time.

• The opportunity to transfer the knowledge and understanding gained from the experience of doing research with a community service organisation to other organisations including my own.
The organisation and the problem

In its 23 years history the Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua has experienced an average loss of five members per annum. The loss, reflecting the transient nature of the local population, was until recently compensated by the recruitment of a similar average number of new members every year. However, more recently, the club has no longer managed to recruit sufficient new members and maintain its capacity to perform as effectively as it has in the past.

Thinking about the above issue has led me to believe it is a problem worthy of research. This was reinforced by the paucity of data concerning capacity building in a community service organisation such as a Rotary club. Collaborative action research provides an excellent vehicle with which to formally study the problem whilst assisting the organisation concerned to build and maintain its capacity.

At the beginning of the project, the Rotary club governance structure was typical of most Rotary clubs. The effective management of the club was the responsibility of a Board elected from the membership of the club. This management structure reflects Rotary International’s model calling membership of the Board to be renewed every twelve months - a practice aimed at:

- leveraging on the diversity of talents within the club to foster regular renewal and bring about new ideas;
- providing members with the opportunity to develop from the experience gained by leading club activities
Figure 1.1 – The Rotary club governance structure

Research question (s) –

The purpose of the research is to investigate and explain the issues faced by a community service organisation experiencing a diminishing membership number. The objective is to collaboratively develop the means to build and maintain organisational capacity.

In addition and as part of the research evaluation the following questions will be asked to assess the appropriateness of the process:

- was action research the appropriate research instrument for this particular inquiry?
- can action research equip and empower participants to address similar issues in the future?
- how did action research contribute to enhancing the researcher’s understanding of an organisation’s development?
- how much did theory, grounded in the data mined as part of the action research intervention, contributed to leading and informing the actions taken?
**Outline of the thesis’ structure**

This thesis comprises eight chapters.

**Chapter one - The Research Project**
The chapter introduces the research project by discussing the purpose for the research, the position of the researcher, the organisation, the problem, and the research question.

**Chapter two - Theoretical Context –**
The chapter establishes the theoretical basis and addresses the philosophical approaches influencing and guiding the research project. It discusses the shift from a mechanistic to an organic conception of society and identifies the interpretive paradigm and its constructivist approach as most appropriate to the conduct of the action research project.

**Chapter three - Methodology**
The chapter discusses the methodological theory, values, principles and practices adopted for this action research project. How the research was planned, why a number of approaches such as qualitative research, process consulting, action research and learning, and grounded theory were combined.

**Chapter four - Project Processes**
The chapter discusses the principles, values, and methodological theory from which the process guiding the research will be drawn.

**Chapter five - Implementation**
The chapter discusses what happened out of the process and how it related to the methodological principles, values and practice adopted for the action research project. It presents what was done and achieved as a result of the project.
Chapter six - Discussion
The chapter discusses and contrast the stated objectives identified at the beginning of the project and with what was achieved as the research journey unfolded.

Chapter 7 – Emerging theory
The chapter presents local theories constructed from the issues that emerged as a product of the participants’ collaborative efforts, observations and reflections over the duration of the project.

Chapter 8 - Evaluation
The chapter discuss achievements against the outcomes identified with the project. Validation of the research, organisation and individual learning and a critical evaluation of the project implementation follow. The chapter concludes with reflections on the implementation of a new governance model by the organisation.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion
The chapter briefly recapitulate on the project aims, approach, and what was achieved.

Conclusion
The project identifies an issue of importance to the Rotary club as it faces the prospect of losing its capacity to effectively continue as a community service organisation. The response is to initiate an inquiry process based on an action research intervention in which the researcher and the Rotary club members will become collaborators.

The next chapter discusses the theoretical context that guided the adoption of an action research approach for the project.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL CONTEXT
Introduction

The purpose of chapter two is to present the theoretical context that influenced and guided this research project. The objective is to demonstrate how existing theories informed the development of a collaborative action research approach intended to construct local theory grounded in the research data.

The research project is taking place in a local community service group which is also a member of an international voluntary organisation. Consequently its governance is significantly influenced, and at times bound by, its parent organisation’s sociological identification with a functionalist paradigm. Functionalism is identified by Burrell & organ (1979) as the dominant 20th century organisational sociological paradigm and is associated with realism and positivism. By contrast, the intervention based on an action research methodology will draw from the interpretive paradigm and an epistemology based on subjective and constructivist arguments.

Assumptions about our world - ‘ontology’; how we learn about it - ‘epistemology’; together with our personal beliefs and values – ‘axiology’; influences how we address and learn from problems. Ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions will in turn lead to particular methods of inquiry being adopted to reflect the individuals and the settings involved. The dichotomies between those different theoretical approaches in the context of an action research inquiry are now discussed.

The theoretical road map shown below serves as a pictorial guide to the remainder of the chapter.
Ontology

Ontology is concerned with assumptions about truth and reality and the question of what there is. For example: are the things that we know what they appear to be or are they manifestations of something quite different?\(^1\) Though not easy to answer these questions need to be asked by researchers when investigating social phenomena (Burrell & Morgan 1979), since the approach taken to address organisational problems will be influenced by the ontological assumptions of participants.

One philosophical perspective or ontology is based on reality being external to the individual. Ontological realism and positivism espouses the theory that truth and reality exist independently of what we think. It leads to defining the world as a logical construct and the belief that social norms will define ideas and behaviour (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Cherry 1999; Charmaz 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). It draws parallels between the laws of nature and social forces to promote

\(^1\) The World Book Encyclopaedia, 1982 M vol 13, ontology as a branch of Metaphysics:
- Qualitative Ontology tries to answer the question, “What is the nature of reality?”
- Quantitative Ontology seeks replies to “How many kinds of ultimate substances are there?”
positive and logical explanations for what is there. For society “Such an ontology assumes a mechanistic words” (Butler, Scott & Edwards 2003: 59) in which order, stability, and predictability are the norms. It has also been identified with the prevailing thinking of organisation theorists and researchers during the best part of the 20th century (Butler, Scott & Edwards 2003; Robbins & Barnwell 1994; Stace & Dunphy 2001).

Another ontological perspective is nominalism which is based on reality being created by individual consciousness. The social world is “…an emergent social process which is created by the individuals concerned” (Burrell & Morgan 1979: 28). Universal concepts cannot be true to all and generalised since only individuals are real and they create their own reality: “something is real when it is constructed in the mind of the actors involved in the situation” (Guba & Lincoln quoted in Creswell 1998: 254). Reality is subjective since: what is seen by the observer will be interpreted as a function of the assumptions, thoughts, and feelings that individual will have concerning the particular phenomenon observed (St-Cyr Tribble & Saintonge 1999).

The assumptions informing such an approach are that complexity and instability characterise a modern and evolving world. A new paradigm calling for the world to shed some of its machine-like image and adopt the use of “adaptive mechanisms” to better manage uncertainty follows (Santos 2002: 223).

Ontologically, action research identifies with a nominalist approach in which human consciousness creates its own reality and is best studied in the field. However, the cause and effect relationship characterising a positivist approach still strongly influences social science (Neuman 2006) and consequently action research. Thus, this action research will progress in the assumptions that:

- social realities will be constructed by the actors in the situation and reflect their individuality
- each actor’s consciousness is likely to be influenced by the pre-existing cultural rules and ideas that identify social groups and structures
This will be an important consideration when conducting collaborative action research in an organisation since multiple realities are bound to emerge: the different perceptions of reality from individuals and the group will influence the interpretation and treatment of the issue(s) being addressed.

The social researcher will need to be aware of the greater problems of generalisation, explanation, and prediction including the subjective versus objective interpretation of similar phenomena by different individuals.

The truth of the matter is that what we see in the world is not determined by what exists “out there”. It is shaped by what our past experience has prepared us to see and by what we consciously or unconsciously want to see.

*(Robertson 1987: 25)*

**Epistemology**

*Epistemology* is the theory of knowledge, how it is acquired and possessed, and the issue of objective versus subjective knowledge *(Burrell & Morgan 1979; Cherry 1999; Charmaz 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000)*. Epistemology, from the Greek *epistêmê* and its Latin’s counterpart *scientia* bring together knowledge and science. Therefore it is not surprising that scientific methods are commonly associated with the acquisition and transmission of knowledge *(Chalmers 1999)*.

There are different theories concerning the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. Natural sciences methods are identified with investigating “external processes in a material world” and social sciences methods “internal processes of human mind” *(Burrell & Morgan 1979: 229)*.

For example, functionalism regards scientific knowledge, derived from the facts as opposed to preconceived ideas, to be the only secure, valid, and objective knowledge *(Chalmers 1999)*. Under that paradigm: knowledge is acquired through an objective use of the senses, and there is no difference between the methods of the natural and the social sciences. The assumption concerning the transmission of knowledge is
that “It is top down, linear and implicit in its transmission” (Butler, Scott & Edwards 2003: 61)2

By contrast, a different epistemological view is promoted by the interpretive school that regards knowledge as more subjective and the product of the observer’s mind (Cherry 1999). It is based on a philosophy that considers “the relationship between the researcher and that being studied as interrelated, not independent” (Creswell 1998: 254). Social reality is seen as fundamentally different to reality in the natural world (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Cherry 1999). Under that paradigm the acquisition of knowledge reflects the reality of the phenomenon being observed and interpreted by the individuals involved (St-Cyr Tribble & Saintonge 1999).

The “background, training, and prior experiences” of participants in social research will shape their approach to social research.

Knowledge and belief about the world do not exist in a vacuum; they are social products whose content depends on the context in which they are produced.

(Robertson 1987: 25)

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2 Under those assumptions this is how knowledge is transmitted:
1. There is a body of correct knowledge that is held by experts;
2. The expert presenters know the answers to performance problem in the organisation;
3. There is little debate or diversity of values about topics and solutions amongst participants;
4. The correct information should be given in the most efficient manner;
5. Top-down is the best way to get a single coherent message across to everyone in the organisation;
6. Learning is an exchange from the expert to the participant;
7. The participants are efficient passive receivers if the message is clear and they are attentive;
8. The participants are ‘blank slates’. (Butler, Scott & Edwards 2003: 61)
Similarly, the transmission of knowledge is based on recipients constructing their meanings from what information is conveyed to them. Because the receiver is always going to individually interpret and make meaning of the input from the world, and be aided and transformed in this process by the social group within which the receiver is situated. 

(Butler, Scott & Edwards 2003: 62)

When knowledge is constructed, as opposed to received, it will also change assumptions relative to the acquisition and possession of knowledge and how this contributes to understanding. Anthony (quoted in Chalmers 1999:1-2) writes:

It was not so much the observations and experiments which Galileo made that caused the break with tradition as his attitude to them. For him, the facts based on them were taken as facts, and not related to some preconceived ideas…The facts of observations might, or might not, fit into an acknowledged scheme of the universe, but the important thing, in Galileo’s opinion, was to accept the facts and build the theory to fit them.

Epistemologically, action research assumptions concerning knowledge and how we know are the product of the observer’s mind and thus subjective (Cherry 1999). Subjectivity influences the state of consciousness or faculty of an individual to know and judge his/her own reality (St-Cyr Tribble & Saintonge 1999). Action researchers take an interpretive approach to social reality which is seen as fundamentally different to reality in the natural world. Social reality, as seen through the prism of action research, is taken to be constructed by the actors in the situation being observed.

3 Under those assumptions this is how knowledge is transmitted:
1. Some of the best solutions can come from fellow employees;
2. All participants possess knowledge that is of high value;
3. Participants are viewed as constructivists and active thinkers with emerging theories about working and learning;
4. Participants can be encouraged to change through support and modelling from the group;
5. Learning involves reflection on action in a group setting and involves effective feedback to individuals;
6. Participants need to be offered learning with no taught answers;
7. Participants add value to themselves as they contribute value to others;
8. The most powerful determinant of what participants can learn is what they already know. (Butler, Scott & Edwards 2003: 61)
Wikipedia (2009) quotes Bachelard who provides a convincing explanation of the pertinence of constructivism when conducting research;

...irrespective of what one might assume, in the life of science, problems do not arise by themselves. It is precisely this that marks out a problem as being of the true scientific spirit: all knowledge is in response to a question. If there were no question, there would be no scientific knowledge. Nothing proceeds from itself. Nothing is given. All is constructed.  
(2009: 5)

**Axiology**

*Ontology* and *epistemology* combines with *axiology*, the theory of moral values (*Mautner* 2000), to influence our assumptions. For example, the values, beliefs and principles identified with a particular individual shaping his/her assumptions concerning truth and reality. Axiology introduces the issue of *spiritual concern* to the field of social inquiry and brings together “the various interpretivist inquiry models” (*Lincoln & Guba* 2000: 169).

Thus, axiology will influence the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of the inquiry paradigm when engaging in social research. For example in the context of constructivism:

> Reality is constructed to reflect the local culture and beliefs i.e. what is right or wrong.  
> Knowledge is transactional/subjectivist; created findings are the end product.  
> Methodology relies on interpretation, argumentation, and reasoning.  

(*Lincoln & Guba* 2000: 169)

Since the notion of *value* will also differ between individual it is likely to influence how truth and reality is perceived and expressed depending on:

- their assumptions about the nature of the society in which they live;
- the influence of that society on them; and,
- the capacity to differentiate between value that is *intrinsic*, valuable for its own sake, as opposed to *extrinsic*, valuable as a means to something else⁴.

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⁴ Subjective theories of values consider things to be valuable only insofar as they are desired. Objective theories of values hold that there are some things that are valuable independently of people’s interest in or desire for them.  
Free Online Encyclopedia (http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/axiology 2009: 1)
Values or axiology will also significantly inform the inquiry process and influence the following choices:

Choice of the problem, choice of paradigm to guide the problem, choice of theoretical framework, choice of major data-gathering and data-analytic methods, treatment of values already resident within the context, and choice of format(s) for presenting findings.

*(Lincoln & Guba 2000: 169)*

**Methodology - Natural versus social inquiries**

*Methodology* encompasses the processes that evaluate methods of inquiry and validation when conducting research. Without “a systematic way of producing knowledge” the observation of societal events are more likely to produce assumptions than advance our understanding of society *(Van Krieken et al. 2006: 599)*. The prevalent orthodoxy is that scientific methods are best able to produce systemic blueprints from which to develop objective responses to society’s problems. This belief is validated by the fact that the natural sciences *scientific methods* have significantly contributed to increasing human knowledge *(Chalmers 1999; Van Krieken et al. 2006)*.

Notwithstanding the contribution of scientific methods, it is also appropriate to question the validity of adopting research methods of the natural sciences when conducting social research *(Burrell & Morgan; Chalmers 1999; Van Krieten et al. 2006)*. The inference is that a different philosophical approach would better suit the complexity associated with researching social and organisational phenomena *(Anderson 1999; Robertson 1987)*.

For example, ontological nominalism, by challenging the reality of universal concepts *(Mautner 1996)*, raises questions as to the applicability of scientific methods when conducting social research. It assumes a view of reality that requires the researcher, as the perceiver of what is or is not real, to construct the research methodology best suited to the particular quest for knowledge being considered. Such an approach would identify the use of quantitative methods with scientific research and regard qualitative methods as better suited to social research *(Van Krieken et al. 2006)*.
The following definition of qualitative research is provided by Creswell (1998) who writes:

It is an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informant, and conducts the study in natural settings.

(1998: 254)

Qualitative research also “produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 10-11). The authors accept that the divide between quantifying and qualifying research data is tenuous at times however they qualify their paradigm as follows:

In speaking about qualitative analysis, we are not referring to the quantifying of qualitative data but rather to a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme.

(1998: 11)

Action research shares with other forms of research the objective of generating new knowledge; however, it also involves “people taking action to improve their personal and social situations” (McNiff & Whitehead 2006: 12). Thus, adopting a qualitative method of inquiry based on collaboration and action will be most appropriate to address the problem(s) faced by a local organisation.

**The evolution of organisational paradigms**

In the philosophy of science, a paradigm is “a pattern of thinking, a set of background assumptions taken for granted” (Mautner 2000: 408). Kuhn introduces the concept of paradigms to explain scientific progress and how it is influenced by “the sociological characteristics of scientific communities” (Chalmer 2000: 107). According to Kuhn a paradigm reflects:

The general theoretical assumptions and laws and techniques for their application that the members of a particular scientific community are taught

5 American philosopher and historian of science (1922-96) who took a more historical and/or sociological look at science. He rejected the earlier views that science is cumulative and replaced it with the concept of paradigm shift or scientific revolutions as a new way of viewing the world and practicing science in it (Mautner 2000: 300-1).
to adopt and sets the standard for the normal way in which inquiry is conducted.

(Mautner 2009: 408)

The concept of paradigms in the context of science acknowledges that progress is not happening in a vacuum and is influenced by changes in the environment in which it occurs (Chalmers 1999).

More recently the notion of a new paradigm has appeared (Hampden-Turner 1999) to include the social sciences and explain the implication of change for organisations. An evolution that leads to a more encompassing definition of a paradigm:

A paradigm is a tentative answer to the question ‘What are the fundamental entities within this area of investigation?’ It tells us where to look, how to construe, and the way in which information should be processed.

(1999: 177)

Thus the concept of paradigm shift also applies when examining changes in society’s patterns of thinking (Beinhocker 1997). Similarly organisations, as members of society, are subject to paradigm shifts when exposed to change. Metaphorically, a paradigm is a net in which the ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises are captured with the axiological assumptions reflecting the environment and the action being pursued (Creswell 1998).

Willmott (1993) also points to social changes as the catalyst to new paradigms being developed.

New paradigms do not parachute from the skies. Rather, they arise out of processes of social and intellectual struggles, often promoted by political and technological developments and contradictions within the wider structure of social relations.

(1993: 688)

A recent case of paradigm shift has occurred with the Newtonian paradigm viewing the world as mechanistic being challenged by the notion that the world is a more complex and less rational place than previously imagined (Hampden-Turner 1999).

Newtonian science, the laws of motion, considers the world to be machine like, predictable, and secure in “the notion that relationships between cause and effect are simple clear and linear” (Tetenbaum 1998: 21). The Newtonian paradigm considers
organisations to be mechanical constructs relying on command and control to achieve clearly identified goals (Butler Scott & Edwards 2003; Robbins & Barnwell 1994; Stace & Dunphy 2001).

Another important assumption of the paradigm is to regard organisations as predominantly closed systems for the purpose of goal achievement. This view is congruent with a pattern of thinking originating from the natural sciences and appropriately named scientific management. It characterises an organisational epistemology based on quantitative research, scientific experiments, and is interested in functionality and rationality. Under that approach, organisations, as social entities, are defined and understood in terms of their structures and functions (Burrell & Morgan 1979).

However, whilst it is questioned today, the contribution of scientific management to the development of the modern organisation must also be acknowledged. Elements of those early management methods, such as centralised control and regulation, still dominate many organisations today and reflect a society which values order and regulation (Van Krieken et al. 2006).

More recently researchers and theorists have developed a new paradigm that takes into account societal influences to better inform our understanding of organisations. Researchers and theorists are now acknowledging that an organisation can no longer be regarded as mechanistic and unaffected by social changes. A consequence of this shift is to acknowledge that organisations are complex and their behaviour hard to predict since:

Intervening to change one or two parameters a small amount can drastically change the behavior of the whole system, and the whole can be very different from the sum of its parts.

(Anderson 1999: 217)

With the human relation school, research conducted into workplaces and on work methods takes into account factors outside the immediate boundary of organisations (Robbins & Barnwell 1994; Van Krieken 2006). Organisations are now acknowledged as open systems and not immune from the pressures and demands of society.
The following table constructed from the writing of (Hampden-Turner 1999: 178-80) contrast four paradigms within the *mechanistic* versus the *organic* conceptions of society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Mechanistic</th>
<th>Organic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic reality consist of:</strong></td>
<td>Things, material, atoms, objects, of solid mass and clear physical dimensions</td>
<td>Networks, waves, dynamisms, patterns of relationship and structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanations proceed by:</strong></td>
<td>Analysis, reduction and isolation of the complex into simpler parts, with either/or polarities</td>
<td>Synthesising, relating, organising into more complex wholes encompassing both one quality and another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomena:</strong></td>
<td>Are assumed to be cumulative, linear and sequential, with more (or less) amounts of a fixed quality. The universe is dead</td>
<td>Have the character of systems, i.e. spatial, circular, and cybernetic with qualities reliant on ecology and homeostasis. The universe is alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knower relationship to know is:</strong></td>
<td>Propositional, e.g. prediction and control, cause and effect and demonstrated capacity for unilateral manipulation</td>
<td>Oppositional, e.g. finest fit, mutual interaction and triggering bilateral energies for synergistic relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.2 – Mechanistic versus organic paradigms*

In conclusion, it is important to also acknowledge the contribution, past, present, and future, that the old mechanistic paradigm has and will continue to make to society. Whilst the two paradigms may be regarded as incommensurable⁶ this characteristic

---

⁶ Different theories are incommensurable: In the sense that on the usual criteria for comparing and ranking theories, neither of the two theories comes out better than the other 

(Mautner 2000: 271)
does diminishes the evolutionary\textsuperscript{7} process that took place and led to the emergence of the new from the old. Thus an appropriate problem-solving approach is to be cognitive of both the old \textit{mechanistic} and the new \textit{organic} paradigms when developing explications for organisational behaviour (Hampden-Turner 1999).

When doing research on organisations, identification with a particular paradigm will have a determining influence on the research journey and call for a research methodology congruent with that paradigm. For example, adopting a positivist approach to the development of knowledge in which social facts will be investigated independently of the perception of the observer(s) (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Cherry, 1999). The opposite is constructivism, an approach leading to knowledge being constructed and produced by the observer(s) (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Cherry 1999). Those approaches and what they imply when conducting research into organisations are now examined.

\textbf{Positivism: a doctrine of the industrial area}

Comte (1798-1857) introduced the word sociology to refer to the science of society\textsuperscript{8}. He believed the scientific methods being applied to the study of nature to be equally appropriate to the study of social phenomena (Cherry 1999). He named his approach to the study of social phenomena \textit{positive} to reflect his views that science describes and predicts but cannot explain (Mautner 2000).

\textit{Positivism} is a theory of knowledge that regards all knowledge to be based on sense experience and its adherents believe:

\begin{quote}
There cannot be different kinds of knowledge. All genuine inquiry is concerned with the description and explanation of empirical facts. There is therefore no difference in principle between the methods of the physical and the social sciences, for instance.
\end{quote}

(Mautner 2000: 438)

\textsuperscript{7} Alternatively identified as revolutionary from a Khunian point of view (Chalmer 1999)

\textsuperscript{8} The concept as first coined by August Comte, widely considered the first modern sociologist. The positivist view is sometimes referred to as scientistic ideology, and is often share by technocrats who believe in the necessity of progress through scientific progress, and by naturalists, who argue that any method for gaining knowledge should be limited to natural, physical, and material approaches. In psychology, a positivistic approach is favoured by behaviourism. (Positivism – Wikipedia 2009)
In the context of research addressing human behaviour, positivism characterises an approach to the study of people and organisations that does not differentiate between the study of social and natural phenomena (Cherry 1999). People’s norms and values reflect their cultural background and will influence their ideas and actions. Objectivism is central to the positivist paradigm and based on existing facts that are external and independent from the observer (St-Cyr Tribble & Saintonge 1999).

The scientific method of inquiry advocated by positivism still prevails as the relevant research paradigm in the area of modern human inquiry (Chalmers 1999; Greenwood & Levin: 2000; Van Krieken et al. 2006).

However, this view is now being challenged with doubts being raised concerning the applicability of transferring natural science methods when performing social research (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Chalmers 1999; Van Krieken et al. 2006).

Criticism of positivism according to Horkheimer includes concerns that it:

- Systematically failed to appreciate the extent to which the so-called social facts it yielded did not exist ‘out there’, in the objective world, but were themselves a product of socially and historically mediated human consciousness.
- Ignored the role of the ‘observer’ in the constitution of social reality and thereby failed to consider the historical and social conditions affecting the representation of social ideas.
- Provided a representation of social reality that was inherently and artificially conservative, and helping to support the status quo rather than challenging it.  
  (Quoted in: Positivism – Wikipedia 2009)

Those criticisms have led to the emergence of constructivism, as social researchers began to question the suitability of a positivist approach when studying social and organisational phenomenon.

**Constructivism: a theory of the post industrial area**

Constructivism, (in epistemology), is:
The theory that knowledge is not something we *acquire* but something that we *produce*, that the objects in an area of inquiry are not there to be discovered, but are invented or constructed.

*(Mautner 2000: 111)*

The constructivist paradigm identifies knowledge as the product of an interaction between the observer and the observed. Under that paradigm, personal, social, and cultural factors lead to the emergence of many realities from which knowledge will be produced or constructed *(St-Cyr Tribble & Saintonge 1999)*. Thus reality is not independent of the actors but tied to their experiences and assumptions of what is real: in brief, their subjectivity.

Constructivism contributes to social change and education through the following characteristics:

- Knowledge is socially constructed: World and information co-construct one another
- Consciousness is a social construction
- Political struggles: Power plays an exaggerated role in the production of knowledge and consciousness
- The necessity of understanding consciousness - even though it does not lend itself to traditional reductionistic modes of measurability
- The importance of uniting logic and emotion in the process of knowledge and producing knowledge
- The inseparability of the knower and the known
- The existence of multiple realities: Making sense of a world far more complex that we originally imagined
- Constructing critical knowledge for critical social action
- The centrality of interpretation: Critical hermeneutics
- Constructing new ways of being human: Critical ontology

*(Kinchenoe quoted in Wikipedia 2009: 4)*

Kuhn’s approach to explaining the development of new patterns of thinking implies the construction of images or; constructivism, by reference to visual gestalt switch to explain how experience leads to the emergence of new perceptions of the environment *(Kuhn 1962)*.

It is also relevant to note that constructivist epistemology *(Wikipedia 2009: 4)* has attracted some criticisms such as:

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9 Reality is independent of human though, but meaning or knowledge is always a human construction. *(Crotty quoted in Constructivism – Wikipedia 2009)*
It either explicitly advocates or implicitly reduces to relativism. This is
because it takes the concept of truth to be a socially “constructed” (and thereby
socially relative) one. This lead to the charge of self-refutation: if what is to be
regarded as “true” is relative to a particular social formation, then this very
conception of truth must itself be only regarded as being “true” in this society.
In other social formations, it may well be false.

Notwithstanding the above, constructivism as an element of the interpretive
sociological paradigm, (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Cherry 199) fits in well with an
action research approach to organisational inquiry. It acknowledges the intention to
discover meanings as opposed to objectively explaining the social phenomenon
being researched.

Instead of the researcher approaching the subject with pre-determined theories
about reality, “reality” is “pre-interpreted” and constructed by those one is
observing.

(Blakie quoted in Cherry 1999: 53)

**Metaphor**

The construction of reality is assisted by the use of metaphor to facilitate
communication and improve understanding in organisations (Allbritton 1995; Cherry
1999) - for example, using the term *current flow* to explain how electricity is
transmitted. In this example the explanation of a scientific phenomenon is provided
by referring to the characteristics of one more familiar and better understood
(Allbritton 1995).

In a complex world, metaphors become *Gestalt switches* that leverage on familiar
concepts to reframe the *a priori* unreal into a reality constructed from our
understanding of it (Leddy 1995).
By recruiting the inferential strategies embodied in people’s interaction with the environment and framing workable understandings of the situations they are in, extend the range of what they can reasonably take to be real.

(Teng 2006:68)

Metaphors provide the means for tacit knowledge resulting from the experience gained from social research to be used to generate a better understanding of organisational needs (Cherry 1999). For example the description of work groups as ‘teams’ triggers images of familiar sporting situations where people combine their skills and knowledge to achieve a common goal.

Metaphors can also implicitly convey an intention to change traditional behaviours by replacing the mechanistic image of organisations with a softer organic, feminine, and more socially responsible one (Hampden-Turner 1999).

Metaphors are no longer limited to the spoken or written word with pictures, posters and images used to convey new ideas (Teng 2006). Management writers Stace and Dunphy (2001) borrow from the natural sciences when representing the more complex new organisational structural forms as assemblies of atoms usually associated with atomic physics. The words of Aristotle “The soul...never thinks without a picture” (quoted in Mintzberg (2005: 363)) illustrates the power of images when developing meanings for more difficult issues.

The use of metaphors assists the action researcher by making it easier to communicate the need to shift from one established paradigm to another that will deliver improvements over its predecessor (Cherry 1999; Reason 1988). A metaphor, by providing a form of conceptual neurological mapping, (Teng 2006) can influence the ontology of the individual exposed to its message since it will reinforce assumptions concerning reality. For example, social research projects may rely on metaphors to conceptualise the assumptions emerging from participant’s shared experience of reality (Leddy 1995). Once this reality is established, participants in the research are better able to increase their knowledge and understanding of the organisation and the specific phenomena being researched.
The use of metaphor provides a method that “Can carry dialogue into a truly creative effort” (Cherry 1999: 49) and contribute to individual and organisational development.

**Conclusion**

An ontological perspective concerning truth and reality, combined with epistemological assumptions relative to knowledge, and what is of value and good, will influence the approach taken to doing research in organisation (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Charmaz 2000; Cherry 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). The perception of a paradigm shift is influencing our understanding of organisations, which are now seen as reflecting the ambiguities and complexity characterising modern society. A shift from the realist, objective and positivist approach to understanding organisations is leading to the emergence of a nominalist, subjective and constructivist approach that is well served by action research.

Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) and Cherry’s (1999) concepts were used to produce the following schema which is to guide this action research journey and reflect the methodology that is presented in chapter 3.
### ACTION RESEARCH

Draws from a paradigm that fits the phenomenon being investigated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONTOLOGY = NOMALIST</th>
<th>EPISTEMOLOGY = SUBJECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions that truth and reality is created by human consciousness and best studied in the field.</td>
<td>Assumptions that knowledge and how we come to know is subjective and the product of the observer’s mind.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### INTERPRETIVE / CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

Social reality is seen as fundamentally different to “reality” in the natural world. Social reality is thought to be constructed by the actors in the situation. Research can be based on and devoted to the construction of images or desirable future theories jointly generated by stakeholders of the system.

*Figure 2.3 – Theoretical context*
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY
Introduction

Chapter three presents:

- the researcher’s reasons and motivation for adopting a research approach relying on a nominalist and constructivist perspective to produce organisational development
- the principles that are intended to guide the approach to the research
- the research methodology drawing from different approaches identified with qualitative research, process consulting, action research, action learning, and grounded theory
- a critical evaluation of the methodology and the challenges of adopting a different approach to human inquiry

Factors influencing the researcher

One of the significant decisions I faced at the beginning of my research journey was the type of methodology I would adopt. The different approaches selected had to achieve the objectives\(^\text{10}\) of the research and guide a significant personal and collaborative epistemological endeavour.

Professionally my worldview has been shaped by a deductive approach to the resolution of problems and the explication of inordinate phenomena. In my work environment, determinism and objectivism are the norms, with behaviourism and its treatment of people as *machine like* the natural orthodoxy (*Burrell & Morgan 1979*). This approach is typical of modern industrial society and has influenced organisations, professions, and the individuals involved. In this context research is viewed as a scientific endeavour of an incremental nature aimed at developing new knowledge in an objective manner (*Chalmers 1999*).

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\(^{10}\) Refer to the objectives outlined in chapter 1 above.
As a result I was tempted to adopt a research methodology reflecting the prevalent functionalist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan 1979) that, up to now, had guided my approach to problem-solving. Approaching research through a methodology congruent with the natural sciences aligns the researcher with the prevalent orthodoxy (Chalmers 1999; Neuman 2006). Thus, minimising the uncertainty associated with the unknown by adopting a more conventional research methodology for my project sounded like a very rational decision.

However, I was also interested to push the boundaries of my comfort zone and use the research as an opportunity to extend my understanding of the sociology of organisations. Adopting a nominalist/interpretive approach through which social reality is to be constructed by the research participants presented such an opportunity. The treatment of learning as a mechanistic process, based on the diffusion of knowledge, is now replaced by an endeavour to learn from practice and creating knowledge from experience (Cherry 1999).

**Research and social principles**

To successfully achieve its intended purpose the approach selected needs to reflect the following principles upon which action research is based.

Firstly, it adopts a theory of the self or ontology acknowledging that:

Separation of the bias of the researcher from the subject being investigated is an illusion that is ultimately shattered through the process of self-reflection. Understanding is gained through interpretation using qualitative methods. The release of human potential is by emancipation from the dictate of compulsion of tradition, precedent, habits or self interest.

(Habermas quoted in Herr & Anderson 2005: 26, 28)

Secondly, it adopts a theory of knowledge or epistemology that:

Transcends mere knowledge generation to include personal and professional growth and organizational empowerment. Addresses the immediate needs of the participants and their organisation. Generates knowledge that can be utilised by those in the setting as well as those beyond the setting.

(Herr & Anderson 2005: 1, 6)
An essential element or quality of action research is to create conditions for the type of learning with the potential to change those who engage in it. Reflecting on the actions taken and their outcome provides participants with opportunities to learn from the experience. It leads to “An epistemology of practice based on reflection in action” (Schon, quoted in Cherry 1999: 44).

Overall it is considered critical to keep in mind the fundamental principle that “Human inquiry is a process of human experience and of human judgment” (Reason 1988: 231). Consequently, the outcome will be influenced by the values and subjectivity of the participants collaborating in the research process.

They are simply human beings in a certain place and time, working away more or less honestly, more or less systematically, more or less collaboratively, more or less self-awarely to seize the opportunities of their lives, solve the problems that beset them, and to understand the things that intrigue them. (Reason 1988: 231)

**Qualitative research**

Qualitative research covers many approaches:

By the term “qualitative” we mean any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. (Strauss & Corbin 1996)

As a methodology to study social reality, qualitative research relies on interpretation and comparison when analysing data, a process influenced by those involved in it (Charmaz 2005; Strauss & Corbin 1998). The goal of qualitative research is to answer the question “What is going on here?” from “The perspective of those who are in the situation being researched” (Bouma 2000: 170). Thus the adoption of a qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, approach when researching a problem related to organisation development offers distinct advantages. For example, it enables the researcher to validate findings by comparing a number of analytical inputs produced by a group of informed participants sharing a vested interest in the research outcome.

Qualitative research, being interpretative, sits at the opposite end of the qualitative versus quantitative or statistical research continuum. However, it is relevant to acknowledge that it is difficult to exclude quantitative measures completely when
engaged in action research and organisation development (Bouma 2000; Mintzberg 2005; Strauss & Corbin 1998).

The qualitative should direct the quantitative and the quantitative feedback into the qualitative in a circular, but at the same time evolving, process with each method contributing to the theory in ways that only each can.  

*(Strauss & Corbin 1998: 34)*

Quantitative research provides the means to identify patterns such as the number of people for and against a particular approach to a problem and assist data analysis and decision making. The research process “Evolves over the entire course of any investigative project” *(Strauss & Corbin 1998: 29)*.

Each of the type of work (e.g., data collection, analysis, and interpretation) entails choices and decision concerning the usefulness of various alternative procedures, whether these are qualitative or quantitative.  

*(1998: 29)*

Thus a constructivist approach to social research conducted in the field can draw from both qualitative and quantitative approaches *(Bouma 2000)*. The issue is to adopt the approach that best suits the purpose of the research. When doing action research the intention is to understand what is happening within the area of inquiry and qualitative methods are well suited to achieve this aim.

**Process consulting**

*Process consulting* is a planned intervention into an organisation where the client is empowered to decide what to do to address identified problems.

The essential function of process consulting is to pass on the skills of how to diagnose and fix organisational problems so that the client is more able to continue on his own to improve the organisation.  

*(Schein 1988: 11)*

*Process consulting* also includes a learning objective.

Again, the consultant does this on the assumption that if he teaches the client to diagnose and remedy the situation himself, problems will be solved more permanently and the client will have learned the skills necessary to solve new problems as they arise.  

*(Schein 1988: 9)*
Process consulting complements collaborative action research and actions learning as an approach to develop organisational capacity. The process consultant and the action researcher aim to address “problems involving human interactions and processes” (Schein 1998: 12). To be effective, those interactions and processes will require that participants collaborate to achieve:

- communication within the group
- building and maintaining the group
- problem-solving and decision making
- development and growth of the group

To achieve the required level of collaboration between the process consultant and other stakeholders it will also be necessary to establish:

A clear understanding of the purpose of the consulting relationship i.e. learning new skills, change in behavior and attitudes, increased capacity;
Criteria for determining which consulting role will be appropriate in a given situation. \(^{11}\)

(Champion, Kiel & McLendon 1990: 66)

**The action research paradigm**

The metaphor of the researcher as a photographer, whose work accurately captures the object of interest, is relevant to the traditional research paradigm. The researcher is expected to be a neutral observer without preconceptions (Glaser 1999) or at least able to shed those when describing what is happening.

Selecting action research represents a departure from that paradigm and a decision to seek understanding of the phenomenon as opposed to a proof of its existence (Miller & Fredericks 1999). It requires the researcher to take an active role within the inquiry and question his/her assumptions (Ladkin 2005; Reason & Bradbury 2001).

\(^{11}\) Campion, Kiel & McLendon (1990) rank roles from high to low level of intervention on the part of the consultant. In this intervention the roles of facilitator and reflective observer in which the consultant helps with process-oriented activities and the client is most responsible for results and capacity building have been selected.
To achieve this neutrality, as an observer, it is also recommended to leave a review of the literature until later on in the project (Coyne & Cowley 2006). This is to prevent existing theories from blocking the emergence of novel explications from the field data collected and analysed (Guillemette 2006).

Action research was developed by Kurt Lewin\textsuperscript{12} with the objective of combining theory with action to produce more effective social changes (Abraham 1997; Dickens & Watkins 1999; McNiff & Whitehead 2006; Drummond & Themessl-Hubert 2007). This objective is achieved through a process promoting the emergence of solutions and explanations to problems whilst giving all participants the opportunity to learn from that process (Teheram, Schachter & Stalker 2005). As the participants in this research are business leaders and professionals a process offering novel ways to address and learn from organisational problems seems very appropriate.

Action research’s ontological alignment is nominalist, interpretive with elements of positivism in its treatment of truth and reality (Cherry 1999; Schwandt 2000). Epistemologically it has a subjective and constructivist approach to the development of knowledge.

According to McNiff & Whitehead (2006) action research, by applying an interpretive and constructivist approach, offers the opportunity to enhance the traditional positivist approach to observing and interpreting events. As a result the researcher is no longer a removed and objective observer, but becomes an active participant who joins in with all the people involved (Cherry 1999). Cherry suggests to the researcher that he/she answers the question:

Does the research paradigm fit the phenomenon being investigated, and is it consistent with the researcher’s understanding of the “reality” being investigated?

\textit{(1999: 54)}

Action research offers a practical, hands on and democratic means to address a problem in collaboration with other stakeholders (Abraham 1997). Adopting action

\textsuperscript{12} A social psychologist in the US Lewin (1890-1947) who “believed people would be more motivated about their work if they were involved in decision-making about how the workplace was run” (McNiff & Whitehead 2006: 36).
research also has the potential to engage all of the population associated with the issue(s) being addressed and researched (Charmaz 2000; Teram, Schachter & Stalker 2005).

Action research that is collaborative gives participants an equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the research. It encourages individuals to participate in research projects by allowing them to produce outcomes that will be relevant to their specific situation (Grant 2007). As a consequence the research process is enriched by the diversity that exists in the mind of participants who construct a reality grounded in their individual ontological and epistemological assumptions (Cherry 1999; Herr & Anderson 2005; Ladkin, D 2005; Reason & Bradbury 2001)).

When working with stakeholders who have very diverse social backgrounds and workplace cultures it is critical to seek outcomes that fit, suit, and reflect that diversity (Nassar-McMillan & Lambert 2003). Some of the intentions and benefits of adopting a participative and collaborative approach when engaging into social research aimed at developing organisations are:

- to encourage the sharing of individual insights and experiences from which participants can develop explications and responses to organisational problems that will be contextual and relevant to their situation.
- to motivate participants to develop themselves and the organisation by implementing change that is the product of the collaborative process described above.

There are similarities between phenomenology and action research and its use of iterative cycles of “Eidetic reduction”\(^\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\) to let explanations emerge (Ladkin 2005: 113). Both approaches aim to produce knowledge that will be specific to the settings in which the research is being carried out (Ladkin 2005).

Action research also encourages “critical subjectivity” vis a vis the problem being investigated by letting meanings emerge from the objective/subjective continuum (Reason quoted in Cherry 1999: 5). This is achieved through the adoption of a

\(^{13}\) Eidetic: a term devised by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) as an attempt to describe our experiences directly, as it is, separately from its origins and development, independently of the causal explanations that historian, sociologists or psychologists might give. (Mautner 2000: 421)
dialectic process or Socratic Method, through which questions are asked to prompt reflections that will eventually contribute to the production of knowledge (Mautner 2000). Finally, understanding emerges when participants in the reflective process become aware of those unconscious realities and latent knowledge described as the art of maieutic or giving birth (Mautner 2000). It results in the development of specific and relevant knowledge that is grounded in the unique individual experience of research participants and an understanding of their own reality.

As a result, action research can develop into a fluid and sometime difficult to control but rich series of activities where the need to accommodate change is integral to the process (Cherry 1999; Dickens & Watkins 1999). Action research, according to Dickens and Watkins (1999: 127), encompasses a ‘…number of activities intended to foster change’. This will be particularly true of the type of action research that is collaborative since the aim is to involve all research participants in the generation of knowledge and learn as a result of their engagement in the research process. (Dickens & Watkins 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000; Teheram, Schachter & Stalker 2005) This is of benefit to an organisation in which a particular problem is being researched since it will empower and equip its members to better manage the future.

**Action learning**

Action learning combines with action research and process management “To make valuable contributions to learning and research” (Zuber-Skerritt & Farquhar 2002: 102). Epistemologically action learning produces “existential knowledge” and is associated with “existential, experiential learning (learning why)” (Zuber-Skerritt & Farquhar 2002: 102).

Action learning offers advantages over other forms of learning when conducting research in an organisation with the objective to develop its capacity to more effectively manage the future (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). This is due to action learning viewing the creation of knowledge as an evolving process produced by people “learning from each other’s experience” (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000: 570). Such a learning process will be in tune with an interpretive approach to reality and
lead participants to jointly produce knowledge and develop the organisation’s future (Cherry 1999; McNiff & Whitehead 2006).

The old approach to learning in organisations drew from the cause and effect relationship. People were “expected not to think for themselves but to do as they are told” with the objective being to “generate learning outcomes consistent with official policy” (McNiff & Whitehead 2006: 31). In a society with a mechanistic view of the world, organisations considered individual learning to be similar to the programming of machines and aimed at meeting production output and targets.

By contrast, action learning is a process that brings together knowledge, learning, and change through continuous learning (Cherry 1999; Herr & Anderson 2005). Morgan quoted in Cherry (1999) has observed that:

When we engage in research action, thought and interpretation, we are not simply involved in instrumental processes of acquiring knowledge, but in processes through which we actually make and re-make ourselves as human being.

(1999 16)

The epistemological assumptions guiding action learning (McNiff & Whitehead 2006: 35) are:

Knowledge is always in process, so it is impossible to create final answers. Processes of knowledge creation involve social processes, so while knowing may be a property of the individual knower, all answers should be regarded as provisional and subject to social critique.

Action learning leverages on action not for the sake of performing but to learn how to perform. The results are secondary since the intention is “To develop a capability not a product” (Trist quoted in Abraham 1997: 26).

Action learning is experiential and dependent on people “Learning from each other’s experience” (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). When conducting action research in a volunteer organisation whose members are business leaders and professionals there is a rich and diverse amount of knowledge and experience to draw from. Combining those individual contributions to knowledge will produce responses to the organisation’s problems that are better suited to its people and the specific environment in which it is operating.
Finally action learning leads the researcher and other participants to a change in practice through *reflective practice* (Cherry 1999).

In the learning work, our practice – what we do in an action sense – is informed by knowledge and vice versa.

(1999: 33)

Reflective practice (*Schön quoted in McNiff & Whitehead 2006: 14*) involves “reflection in action” and “reflection on action” a process that requires stepping back “from the action in order to make sense of it”. This reflection on action takes us past the level of *superficial learning* to achieve the *deep learning* that will optimise the potential of action learning on practice (Cherry 1999).

**Grounded theory**

In the chosen methodology, action research is complemented by grounded theory for the treatment of the qualitative data collected and the development of explications for what is being observed (*Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1998, Guillemette 2006*). The development of theory from primary and secondary data collected and analysed by a number of participants associated in the action research project provides many advantages (*Glaser & Strauss 1967*), for example:

- to equip participants associated with the development of grounded theory with a better understanding of the problem that led to the research question (*Cherry 1999*)
- the specificity of the research outcome to the particular social issue being investigated is acting as a guarantor of its contextual validity and relevance to participants (*Glaser & Strauss 1967*)

A feature of grounded theory is the collection of large amount of rich data (*Cherry 1999; Charmaz 2000; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1998*) from which explanations will be drawn. Grounded theory, as a research method, was developed by Glaser and Strauss (*1967: 3*) as ‘…a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses’. From this initial partnership a methodological split occurred between Glaser and Strauss concerning “the researcher’s role, activity, and level of
intervention in relation to the procedures used within the data analysis process” (Walker & Myrick 2006: 547).

Glaser advocates a process that will let theory emerge directly from the data whilst Strauss and Corbin promote a more structured approach. I elected to use Glaser’s data analysis process and more specifically his coding of the data in an endeavour to produce ‘...research that fits, works, is relevant, and readily modifiable’ and free from preconceptions (Glaser, 1999: 841). I aimed for the information emerging from the research data to reflect the participants’ consciousness of the problem and to be specific to the organisation being studied. This was perceived as important by the researcher since he associated with Glaser who states, when reflecting on why people use grounded theory:

Their reasons are the grab, openness, freedom, and conceptualisation provided by the method. But most of all, they wish to get as what is relevant and works. They want to make meaningful and lasting contributions. What is going on always is there, and perceptions are not.

(1999: 841)

Teram, Schachter and Stalker (2005: 1129) describe grounded theory as constructivist with ‘elements of positivist thinking’ and promote participation to mitigate subjectivity. Charmaz (2000), states that both Glaser, and Strauss and Corbin were attracted to the objective contribution of positivism when treating the research data. Action research, by engaging all of the population associated with the problem in the research process, ensured the data collected would produce more objective and relevant information (Charmaz 2000; Teram, Schachter & Stalker 2005).

I was conscious that research participants came from very diverse social backgrounds and workplace cultures. Thus it was important to adopt an approach that would avoid developing outcomes that would not fit, suit and reflect that diversity (Nassar-McMillan & Lambert 2003). I was acutely aware of the importance to develop theory that would be contextual and acknowledged as relevant to the problem faced by participants.

The aim was for grounded theory, as the end product of the research (Charmaz 2005) to accurately reflect and relate to the particular settings of this research intervention.
Critical evaluation of the methodology

Since the methodology is principally constructed from a different approach to human inquiry that is based on action research, a critical evaluation is provided to assist the researcher unfamiliar with this approach.

The researcher needs to understand what action research is and how it differs from more familiar approaches to studying organisations. For example the action researcher:

- unlike other researchers is not a remote observer and has to become intimately involved in the action and take the risk of losing the advantage of being the expert outsider
- must strive to obtain the collaboration of all who have a stake in the research
- recognises that the research issue is not static but part of an evolving and changing environment: this may send the research in a different direction to the one taken at the beginning of the process
- has to carefully manage a process that can be difficult and, at times, frustrating for participants unfamiliar with the level of personal engagement involved. It is critical to establish the level of trust that will permit the sharing of reflective though from which critical truth will emerge
- is required to question the earlier interpretation of the data by using multiple cycles of inquiry and data sources

The iterative cycles associated with action research can lead to doubts, as the process is experimental and causes participants to question their original assumptions. The researcher and participants may be tempted to see a repetition of the research cycles as a sign of failure.

The biggest requirement of action research is that whatever questions we ask, we continue to revisit our answers.

(Cherry 1999: 22)

Being qualitative in nature and reflecting a constructivist approach, action research can be affected by the bias of individual participants. Action research is value laden
and likely to challenge the organisation’s current values and norms. The ethical implications of action research for the researcher and other participants include being aware of the following issues:

How far do we challenge? What right have we to do so? How do we balance challenge with respect for the customs and traditions of others? (Informit e-library 2003).

**Conclusion**

The methodology adopted is relying on a nominalist and constructivist paradigm to optimise the outcomes sought from participants in this action research intervention. The methodology is also dependent on the use of a qualitative approach to the collection and treatment of the research data. Other methods selected include process consulting and action learning to achieve the maximum level of collaboration learning from and by participants. The combination of those approaches is intended to lead to the development of theory that will be grounded in the contributions of participants and of relevance to the organisation and its people.

The next chapter draws from this chapter and the previous one to present the processes adopted for the project. The key themes are collaboration, reflection, and emergence leading to the construction of a reality that is relevant and leads to the development of local capacity and practice.
CHAPTER 4

PROJECT PROCESSES
**Introduction**

The process adopted for the project is intended to:

- reflect the theoretical context presented in chapter 2 and a paradigm shift from which a reality specific to the participants and their setting is to emerge
- practice, as outlined in chapter 3, a methodology based on project participants collaborating in an epistemological pursuit grounded in an interpretive and constructivist approach to social inquiry
- describe the method and steps used to conduct the research project and develop opportunities to learn from the experience

**Project planning**

The first step in the project planning was to seek approval to carry a collaborative action research intervention on an issue of importance to members of the Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbandua. This was achieved when the Board of the club:

- agreed that *building and maintaining capacity* was a critical issue that needed to be addressed by the club
- endorsed the use of a research approach and inquiry process reliant on active collaboration between the researcher and club members
- gave written permission for the researcher to go ahead with the project

Obtaining agreement that initiating the project was critical to the club’s future was in itself a necessary and important step to the process of developing the organisation. By identifying the problem and acknowledging the need to address it the club’s Board also demonstrated its willingness and capacity to examine and improve its own processes.

A number of separate but linked objectives were identified under the heading of building and maintaining club capacity:

- address the immediate issue of *building club capacity*, an objective associated with the recruitment of new members

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14 A copy of the letter giving permission is in Appendix A
• address the longer term issue of *maintaining club capacity*, an objective associated with retaining members

• achieve the learning that would produce the changes required to address the issues identified above - an objective associated with collaboration and collective reflection leading to action and learning: this was recognised as a critical aspect of the process since the project aimed to equip club members with the skills to identify and address future needs for change and organisational development

Identifying those objectives gave participants a clearer insight into the project and what it intended to deliver in the short and long terms. The intention was to make it easier for participants to collaborate in the process of developing the organisation by identifying what it aimed to improve.\textsuperscript{15}

The next step was to identify how the above objectives or improvements would be achieved.\textsuperscript{16} It involved mapping out the action and collaborative part of the project into a number of stages and activities identified as:

• explaining the action research methodology and the level of involvement required of club members:
  
  o the role(s) of the researcher and club members as co-researchers: role(s) of Board members, reference group members and club members generally
  
  o the iterative nature of an action research approach
  
  o the criticality of collaboration
  
  o the impact of uncertainty and subjectivity when developing local truth about the issues being researched
  
  o explanations are not found; they emerge and are constructed by the actors though a process of reflection on their assumptions, underlying values, and beliefs

\textsuperscript{15} Refer to process consulting and chapter 3 above.

\textsuperscript{16} Refer to process consulting and chapter 3 above.
• identifying and agreeing to the causes for the current loss of capacity:
  o the need for trust and openness
  o being honest, taking responsibility for current issues
  o contributing to the identification of issues by participating in focus
groups discussions, questionnaires and interviews
  o differentiating between symptoms and causes for the loss of capacity
• developing and implementing plans to address the identified issues:
  o reviewing the options available
  o deciding on what to do i.e., adopt, adapt or develop the actions to be
taken
  o agree on the implementation of the selected remedial actions
  o assigning roles and taking individual and collective responsibility for
  the process
• assessing the effectiveness of the actions taken:
  o agree on the criteria for success
  o assess the results objectively
• reviewing the plans or developing new plans based on the learning achieved:
  o reflect on what has and has not worked
  o learn from the above to review existing plans or develop new plans
  o share experience and knowledge openly
• reflecting on the project and what it has achieved:
  o individual learning and change
  o organisational learning, change and growth

Whilst identifying the project objectives intended to give participants an
understanding of what it aimed to deliver, identification of how this would be
achieved was to allow participants to identify with its process. The development
and communication of the steps through which the action and collaboration was
to take place explained how participants would be involved. Having a road map
at the beginning of the project was to provide opportunities to reflect on the
process as it evolved such as asking: are we on track? is the original approach
still working? do we need to go back and revisit an earlier step?
Participants’ profiles and motivation to become involved

Approximately 20 members of the Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua were involved in the research project. They represented a diverse group of business leaders and professionals of both genders ranging in age from 30 to 65. The project planning identified a number of interactions that would structure the collaborative process between the researcher and club members. Those included monthly meetings of the club’s Board, formation of a reference group, and interactions with club members’ individually in interviews and informal discussions or collectively during the club’s weekly meetings.

Figure 4.1 – Research participants

To optimise the motivation to collaborate with and contribute to the process, what the project would deliver to participants in addition to what it would deliver to the club was also identified and communicated. The intention was to define the relationship between the club members and the researcher by emphasising what they would gain by participating in the project. It was important to communicate that the process was a vehicle that would deliver tangible benefits to both the club members and the researcher united by a common purpose17.

17 Refer to chapter 2 above and process consulting.
For club members, including Board and reference group members, the motivation to participate in the project was to develop the club’s capacity to effectively operate as a community service organisation. This required the club to both increase the current membership level and retain existing members, an outcome dependent on the members themselves. Action research was identified as offering an effective approach to engage club members in the identification, development, and implementation of remedial actions to address the issue of club capacity. Another anticipated long lasting benefit of the project is the experience to be gained by club members from participation in critical reflection and evaluation of the actions taken (Cherry 1999; Greenwood & Levin 2000). The learning available from their involvement in the project was also intended to equip club members with the knowledge and experience to address issues affecting club capacity in the future (McNiff & Whitehead 2006). The skills associated with “how to diagnose and fix organizational problems” should also be of value to club members in their professional activities (Schein 1988: 11).

For the researcher, the project is an opportunity to experience action research and grounded theory for future career development. In a project related to human inquiry, the adoption of a research approach relying on collaboration and reflection to construct explanations and responses to identified problems provided rich learning opportunities. The experience was to equip the researcher with:

- a better understanding of the contribution that collaborative action research can make to organisational development
- the experience and knowledge to assist others in doing the same

(Cherry 1999; McNiff & Whitehead 2006)
Assumptions guiding the process

The research design was influenced by the following characteristics and assumptions concerning the club’s membership:

Many club members had held Board positions, including president, giving the organisation the advantage of a pool of knowledge and experience that could be readily drawn from. The research project was to provide an opportunity to assess if this assumption was correct by evaluating the actual level of contribution made by experienced members. For example, it would assess if long serving members contributed to the effective mentoring of new members and succession planning in the club. This was to be achieved by engaging old and new members to critically reflect on their respective perception of the reality concerning this issue.

The club’s membership was made up of business leaders and professionals who had the knowledge and experience to manage organisational issues in their place of employment. Working in collaboration with such a group of people was perceived as an advantage since they would have been familiar with many of the concepts associated with organisational development. For club members the learning available from applying an action research approach should have also offered attractive development opportunities transferable to their place of work. For example, they could act in the dual roles of participants implementing change as well as stepping aside to observe and reflect on what is happening to themselves and others involved in the process. This was assumed to lead to an increased level of participation and motivation in the project by participants who would relate to and welcome those learning opportunities.

An important requirement to effectively implementing a collaborative action research project is that it be carried out accurately and honestly. For this to be achieved participants in the process must be prepared to trust each other and work openly and collaboratively (Abraham 1997; Cherry 1999; McNiff & Whitehead 2006; Reason 1988). I regarded my position of an insider working in collaboration with other insiders as an advantage since I did not have to establish my credentials. Having a
long affiliation with the club and many of its members would facilitate an inquiry process reliant on trust, openness, and collaboration. This was based on the premise that individuals sharing a commitment to community service would also commit fully to an inquiry process dependent on the principles and values described above.

**Groups and participants in the process**

In an organisation development project calling on participants to express and discuss their assumptions openly, multiple realities are bound to emerge\(^{18}\), and a number of groups were identified to structure the process. Having discreet groups contributing to that process was to provide additional opportunities to examine and question the assumptions made from different organisational perspectives. However, collaboration and reflection within and between the groups was also critical if a shared reality was to eventually emerge. This was important to the construction of explanations that would fit and be accepted as valid by the club as a whole.

The process of collaborating to construct relevant explications for the phenomenon being studied was compared to assembling a jigsaw puzzle with missing or irrelevant pieces. To have a number of people assemble the puzzle would make it more likely that irrelevant pieces would be disregarded and missing pieces reconstructed. A reference group member also associated the process with *collecting and sifting through artefacts to build an understanding of the people who had produced those artefacts*.

**The Board**

The Board was the client; it identified the research problem and gave approval for the action research project to go ahead. Establishing this relationship was essential to give legitimacy to the project and ensure ongoing Board support and regular access to club members at the weekly meetings.

\(^{18}\) Refer to the perception of reality in action research as discussed in chapter 2 above.
Board members were asked to visualise their relationship with the researcher as similar to the relationship between a client and a consultant. They were informed of the requirement that all participants genuinely contribute to a problem-solving process calling for iterative cycles of actions, observations and reflections (*Cherry 1999; Schein 1988*). The process was also identified as likely to take some time since it aimed to go below the surface of what was happening and uncover the causes of the problem as opposed to its symptoms. Board members were also assured that the individual data collected as part of the research would remain anonymous. It was explained that whilst the information derived from the data would be shared it would not be identified back to individual contributors. It was agreed that guaranteeing anonymity was critical to letting assumptions emerge freely and optimise participation and contribution by and from club members. Informing Board members was considered an investment as they were expected to share their understanding of the process and promote collaboration amongst participants. Given the fluid and difficult process of action research it was important to empower the club leaders with the knowledge to provide support and guidance to club members when necessary.

As the journey unfolded, the Board also provided a forum for periodical reviews of the plan, the actions being implemented, the findings, and the progress made during the project. As the client, the Board had the task of assessing if the project was evolving successfully or not and decide to continue with or alter the action plan. Those assessments and decisions were informed by reports provided by the researcher and the reference group. Board members were also encouraged to guide their assessment and decision making by drawing from their observations of the unfolding process and reflect on what had been and remained to be achieved.

Meetings of the Board were formal forums at which assessments that the actions taken were contributing or not to the project objective could be made. They were opportunities to confirm that the Board, as the project client, maintained an involvement in the process and the outcomes emerging from it. Since most Board members were past presidents of the club their individual and collective experience

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19 Refer to process consulting and the relationship between participants discussed in chapter 2 above.
offered rich opportunities for reflective discussions. This provided a process that allowed for the issues emerging from the data collected to be debated and challenged by participants with a good working knowledge of the organisation.

Reference group

A reference group was formed to observe, reflect and review progress made as the action research journey unfolded.

The reference group consisting of three Boards members, including the President, was positioned as an intermediary between the Board and the membership of the club. Of all the participants in the project, reference group members were the most closely associated with the researcher in ensuring the process was kept as orderly as feasible. It provided a safe harbour in which to convene when the turbulent process of constructing meaning from the data appeared to go nowhere and required re-evaluation.

A very important role of the reference group was to reflect on each of the steps being taken and comment on what was happening throughout the execution of the action research project. The intention was to identify, validate and refine emerging findings as the analysing and reflecting process evolved with the gathering of more data. The objective was to avoid any initial categorisation of the data that could limit its meaning and restrict the iterative process through which further explorations of the identified issues would let deeper meanings emerge. This resulted in a process informed by the reflective capacity of each member to distil meaningful explanations from the data collected and the observations made. This was critical since the explanations for what was happening were used to decide on the next step to be taken to advance the project.

Deliberations of the reference group were communicated to the Board and the membership at large to establish and maintain a general awareness of the unfolding process and the emergence of new issues.
Club members

Club members were relied on and encouraged to play the dual role of data providers and interpreters of that data. The intention was for club members to construct explanations for what had happened or would happen as a result of specific past, present or future club actions. Workshops were opportunities to observe and reflect on the interaction between members as well as between member(s) and the researcher.

Whilst some club members were experienced others were not and this provided opportunities to contrast individual perceptions and assumptions of the issues being addressed. The intention was to identify the influence of club members’ understanding of and experience with the club on the level of participation in and contribution to the project. For example, would newer members construct meanings that would differ, from those provided by older members, to offset the absence of formal organisational knowledge? This was perceived to be important since the club aims for its newer and usually younger members to play a leading role in attracting new and younger members to the club.

Interactions between club members and the researcher occurred at different levels ranging from:

- individual formal/informal as in *interview* and *impromptu conversation* outside the club’s meeting venue
- collective formal/informal as in *workshop* and *impromptu questions and answers sessions* at weekly club meetings

The researcher

As a member of the Rotary club my position was that of an insider working in collaboration with other insiders but also that of an insider researcher studying himself and his practice (*Herr & Anderson 2005*). This required me to be particularly vigilant when assessing participants and myself to avoid the preconceptions associated with what Herr and Anderson (2005) refer as the bias and
prejudices that come from being introspective about self and other insiders. To achieve this aim it was essential to remain aware of the issue and include other participants, as observers of the process, when assessing and/or evaluating research data.

**Project cycles**

The collaborative action research process was expected to involve more than one cycle of planning, implementing, observing, reflecting and reviewing. The objective was to let the process evolve as data was being collected, analysed, and meanings constructed. An approach followed that was intended to contribute to the emergence of new ideas from which the process could be further refined as participants became more familiar and comfortable with the inquiry process itself.

The first cycle was to provide an opportunity to examine the problem identified by the club and develop a plan to address it. The aim was for participants to familiarise themselves with and explore the process and approaches to problem-solving and organisational development open to them. Up to now club members had been involved in managing processes associated with the provision of community service activities and the emphasis was on solving community problems. The project challenged this mind set by requiring club members to collaborate and address a problem affecting the club.

The first cycle allowed participants to question both their assumptions concerning the problem faced by the club and their commitment to become change agents. It allowed participants to slowly construct and accept a new reality before developing the responses that could begin to address the identified problem.

The second cycle was built on the experience and knowledge gained from the first cycle. Participants had become more familiar with the techniques used and more open with their analysis and comments. When the initial attempts to address the problem failed, club members were asked to consider trialling a more radical approach. The need for change and replace the existing club governance model with
a new model better adapted to the current situation started to become a topic of conversation.

The second cycle provided participants with the opportunity to probe deeper into the organisation and confirmed the issues that had emerged from the assessments made during the first cycle. The iterative process of action, observation, analysis and reflection became more effective as participants’ collaborative effort to address the problem was unimpeded by some of the doubts observed in the first cycle. The cyclic problem-solving process was informed by the action learning process discussed in chapter 3 above in which learning through action provides participants with the confidence to consider and introduce change.

**Data collection methods and procedures**

Action research is based on all participants openly collaborating in the research process and contributing freely to the gathering of primary data (*Creswell 1988; McNiff & Whitehead 2006*). To foster a climate in which participants felt comfortable in contributing openly to the research, the researcher had to guarantee confidentiality when requested (*Abraham 1997*). The anonymity of individual contributions was achieved by using a numerical code to identify participants involved in a one on one interview and their responses to individual questionnaires. The following instruments were used to capture, cross check, and reflect on the data provided by participants.
A number of workshops were held to coincide with the club’s weekly meetings. The first workshop was conducted to introduce the research, its objectives, and explain what collaborative action research is, including the level of involvement expected from participants and the researcher. As the journey unfolded workshops were used to provide feedback and exchange information between club members and the researcher. At those workshops, members also had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher and be informed of other participants’ aggregate feelings and contributions to the research. The workshops provided the researcher with forums at which his and the reference group interpretations of the data could be questioned and validated. An unexpected outcome of those workshops was to consolidate the position of the researcher as a consultant and confirm the seriousness and importance of the project to the future of the club and its members.
Questionnaires

Following the identification of the problem by the Board and its endorsement by the membership, a number of questionnaires were used to seek members’ inputs. Initial questionnaires asked members why the problem existed, what was causing it and how it may be resolved. By providing anonymity to respondents, questionnaires were intended to draw a wide range of responses that could be assembled into a body of information reflecting the diversity of views within the membership of the club. An intended outcome of questionnaires was to allow members assumptions to emerge and draw from the different interpretations of the issues raised to further inform the research (Cherry, 1999). The responses to questionnaires were also used during the workshop sessions as the building blocks from which to develop responses and formulate plans that would address the identified issues. As the research progressed, complementary questionnaires, based on the data collected thus far, were formulated and issued to clarify or challenge the picture being drawn and further refine the process.

Interviews

The one on one interviews between the researcher and club members provided the richest source of data. A face to face interview is a time-consuming endeavour, however, it is a very effective means to collect data (Neuman 2006). Two rounds of interviews were conducted to coincide with the first and second cycle of the research project. Initially, an approach was made to the club membership asking for volunteers willing to participate in an interview. This did not work, and the researcher had to ask members individually - an approach that was more successful since all the members asked were eager to participate. The selection of interviewees was conducted with the intention to include experienced and less experienced members as well as male and female members. After agreeing to be interviewed each participant was asked for his/her consent to use a tape recorder and all eight members involved agreed to their interview being recorded. The interview lasted between one and one and a half hour on average
and followed a set format\textsuperscript{20}. Interviews were conducted in the privacy of the interviewee’s office at a time of their choosing. The combination of familiarity with the setting and the interviewer allowed for a very open exchange in which the interviewee was able to freely contribute to and reflect on the unfolding action research journey (Neuman 2006).

The first cycle of interviews was carried out in November 2007, three months after the research project had commenced. The second cycle of interviews was initiated to coincide with the second cycle of the action research project and commenced in April 2008. Interviews were conducted in March, April and May 2008 at a time when the research had been reinvigorated by the decision to change the emphasis from a segmented to a centralised approach to building club membership and capacity. Interviews provided valuable individual insights with which to balance and contrast reflections and observations made by the researcher and members of the reference group.

**Reflective discussions**

Reflective discussions were encouraged and held as part of scheduled and informal meetings between the researcher and:

- The Board members who were asked to reflect on the results of data and information provided by the researcher as well as their individual observations of the project and its process. Their reflections were those of the project client with a vested interest in the process and its outcomes but at times somewhat detached from its day to day operation.

- The club President, a relatively new member was able to reflect on the impact of the process and actions taken from the perspective of somebody with a limited knowledge of the club and the Rotary organisation. This allowed for the construction of a different dialogue unfettered by reference to past club experience. It was an opportunity to examine the perceptions of a new leader

\textsuperscript{20} A sample of the format used to guide the interview process is at Appendix B.
against the information provided by members with a longer association with and experience of the club.

- The reference group members who were asked to reflect on the process from a number of perspectives such as:
  - club members and participants in the project; and
  - reference group members informed by the data provided by the researcher

Reference group members offered another opportunity to enhance the process of constructing meanings by engaging in “The meta reflective process” (Cherry 1999: 17) and the three levels of awareness associated with it\textsuperscript{21}.

Other more informal and opportunistic reflective discussions occurred between the researcher and club members and between club members themselves as reported to the researcher. The majority of those reflective discussions were initiated during the club weekly meetings or during club’s community projects. Each of those settings led to different opportunities with discussions at club meetings being less exploratory than discussions held during club projects. The one hour available during club weekly meetings does not allow for in-depth open discussions. By contrast, the opportunities for open dialogue are far greater outside the formal structure of the club weekly meeting. This is a recognised issue for a breakfast club and identified as one of the issues to be addressed by the club\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{21} Cherry (1999: 17) identify three positions or levels of awareness from which the meta-reflective process operates:
  1. In the first position we take action without thinking.
  2. In the second position we also stop and think about what we are doing.
  3. In the third position we think about the way we are thinking.

\textsuperscript{22} Members of a breakfast club, as opposed to an evening club, are less likely to engage in lengthy conversations since they have to go to work at the end of the one hour meeting which is mostly taken by club business. To address this issue breakfast clubs have to provide opportunities for members to interact outside the regular weekly meeting.
An extensive use of note taking took place during the research to capture specific moments that would become important to position and relate actions and observations leading to the emergence of new ideas. This assisted personal reflections and interpretations from which assessments could be made and the ensuing construction of explanations discussed with other participants.

Another method relying on writing to develop meanings was to draw linkages between core themes and explore their possible explanations and or consequences on the club’s operation. For example, it explored the impact that club members’ unfamiliarity with the club’s rules and regulations has on the ability to be creative and introduce change. Themes emerging from the data gathered during questionnaires, interviews and members’ feedback were first grouped in tables and then written on a whiteboard. The technique, used during workshops, assisted the development of meanings by drawing links between those themes and challenging participants to contribute further explanations until saturation was achieved.

Diagrams as a form of pictorial metaphors to represent concepts and emerging realities provided opportunities to remove some of the ambiguity inherent with verbal exchanges between participants. For example, the use of a diagram to explain the iterative process of action research was a valuable tool to familiarise participants with an unfamiliar approach to collaborative problem-solving. The diagram, by providing participants with a basic understanding of the action research process encouraged more probing questions on what was expected of them and led to a greater commitment to the project.

During the project journey sketches were also used to capture the mood of participants to quickly and clearly show changes in attitude and perception. The picture of an individual on a path expressing a different assessment of his/her role
and contribution to the project as the journey unfolded, provided a very clear message of changing realities over time\textsuperscript{23}.

The following sketch, based on feedback from participants, was drawn to depict the low level of participation in club’s governance and consequential impact on motivation and energy. Participant agreed that it was an accurate pictorial representation of the climate within the club.

\textbf{Figure 4.3 – Impact of low participation on motivation}

\textsuperscript{23} The pictorial metaphor of individual realities changing over time is included in the discussion chapter figure 6.3
**Data capture and treatment**

The objective to develop explanations that would be specific to the organisation involved in the research and relate to its problem influenced the capture and treatment of the data. All participants were actively solicited and encouraged to contribute to the large volume of data necessary to qualitative research and the development of grounded theory (*Cherry 1999; McNiff & Whitehead 2006; Strauss & Corbin 1988*).

Since the majority of the data collected was qualitative its treatment relied on participants providing explanations for what it meant. This approach aimed to clarify and reassess the individual and collective assumptions made at different stages of the project. The objective was to involve contributors in a reflective process intended to construct a more relevant reality from which new opportunities to develop the organisation could emerge.

The data provided by participants was examined by the reference group and assumptions made as to possible emerging themes. The product of the reference group evaluation was then fed back to participants during workshops, interviews and through questionnaires to further explore and refine those emerging ideas and themes.

As the iterative data capture and treatment process evolved it provided contributors with increasingly relevant information to help decipher the tapestry of meanings being woven.

**Observations and reflections**

Observation and reflections made by the researcher and other participants were recorded in a journal, notes, and reports to capture emerging themes and provide a chronological account of the research project and its evolution. These assisted participants during discussions to assess progress made and reflect on what had been
accomplished to date. The process was semi structured with particular events such as workshops and meetings leading to the consignment of observations and reflections in a journal. Notes and reports were also written to capture and communicate emerging ideas and themes. The process was iterative and spontaneous as reflection on written material led to more reflections and ideas that were added to the body of information being assembled.

A feature of action research identified as important is the opportunity to research the self as well the organisation, its people and the problem (Herr & Anderson 2005). The comparison of personal observations and reflections with those of other participants was intended to identify the subjectivity inherent with self assessment in order to arrive at a more objective construct of the phenomena being reported. Ladkin, (2005: 110) writes ‘…when another regards me, he or she does so more objectively than I am able to regard myself’. The contrast of data identified as subjective and objective informed the emergence, construction, acceptance and validation of local explanations that the researcher, and other participants, could eventually identify with.

Observations and reflections by and from participants, individually and in groups, were essential to making sense of the jigsaw puzzle of data being assembled and from which the deduction of explanations was to eventually emerge.

**Validation**

A characteristic of qualitative research is that individual contributions feed into the process of developing explications for the phenomenon being investigated. However, those contributions are likely to be subjective and reflect the assumptions of individual participants. The process adopted was concerned with providing a mechanism capable of delivering a product that would be acknowledged as valid and credible by all participants.

To produce data that will have internal validity requires validation by participants through a process that will act as a sieve and filter the bias and prejudices of
individual responses. Herr and Anderson (2005: 50) identify credible data as data that “ring true” to those that provide the data. The research project intends to have individual assumptions tested by the collective, thus providing a process leading to results that can be endorsed as relevant to the research and its participants.

Validity is also enhanced by the use of different data sources and instruments - a process identified with triangulation (Abraham 1997). In the context of this research, different groups and individuals contributed to the research data via discussions, questionnaires and recorded interviews.

**Conclusion**

The project processes provided a suitable road map for the research and aptly guided an action research approach leading to the development of local explanations through the use of grounded theory. Whilst participants were challenged by an unfamiliar approach to organisational development the process helped by providing learning opportunities and increasing confidence as experience and knowledge was gained.

The challenge found with the research methodology related to having to rely on a number of participants for the gathering and analysis of sufficient data with which to develop relevant theory. The qualitative nature of the data provided by participants and its subsequent analysis influenced by the subjectivity of the individuals involved, largely confine its findings to the organisation involved. However, whilst this raise an issue as to how applicable the findings will be to other settings, it is believed that at least elements of it are bound to be of value to other organisations.

The reward of adopting a qualitative research methodology reliant on collaboration and cooperation to develop grounded theory has been to learn new skills with and from other participants. Also highly beneficial from a personal perspective was to become conscious of the potential for my prejudices to influence the research findings. To be constructive required me to acknowledge my subjectivity and being critical of my interpretation of data and events. This occurred as the process of applying the different techniques identified earlier led to learning by doing.
observing and reflecting on the result. Whilst endeavouring to do so did not remove the risk of introducing bias, I believe it has reduced it.

In the next chapter a chronological account of the implementation and outcomes achieved from the process adopted for this collaborative action research project is presented.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION
Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the action research journey using the process outlined in chapter 4. Two distinct iterative cycles were conducted with data and findings from the first cycle contributing to inform and refine the second cycle. The approach was heavily reliant on all club members’ participation in and contributions to the research process. Over time, they collaborated to develop explanations, new ideas, and knowledge through the application of iterative processes involving action, observation, analysis and reflection.

The chapter concludes with reflections on the journal kept during the research journey.

Cycles’ overview

Two cycles were conducted over the duration of the project. The first cycle commenced in July 2007 when a meeting was held with the president of the organisation, a Rotary club, selected for the project. At that meeting the concept of carrying out an action research project on an issue of significance to the club was introduced. The president was very receptive to the idea as he had been concerned with the loss of energy and capacity for some time, a situation he intuitively attributed to a reducing membership level. He also indicated being equally concerned by not having a strategy that club members could identify with. The adoption of a problem-solving approach based on cooperation and collaboration to achieve some form of consensual response was therefore attractive to him.

At the end of the meeting the president asked the researcher to speak at a meting of the club’s Board where the decision to become involved in the action research project would be ratified.

The support of the president, a leader able to influence other Board members, represented a positive step in the process of having the project approved by the club.
His personal commitment to the project also gave the researcher access to a key ally able to provide strong support, facilitate the process, and, when required, reenergise other participants along the journey.

Early in 2008 the decision was made to rethink the strategy developed and implemented in the six months to December 2007. This was consistent with the action research process reliant on iterative cycles informed and improved by reviews and changes based on what worked or did not work (Abraham 1997; Cherry 1999; Reason 1988). The data collected during the first cycle and its assessment pointed to a need to reframe the problem and develop a new approach. This was carried out and eventually led to the acknowledgement by participants of the need for more radical change than was initially assumed. The researcher was careful to convey that the original plan had not failed but had provided information from which a plan better suited to the club’ specific situation could be formulated.

The second cycle concluded after the club had adopted a different operating structure aimed at devolving responsibility and empowering members. This signalled both the end point of the formal cooperative research journey and a new beginning for participants. The objective is for club members to continue working cooperatively and apply their collective experience and new knowledge to the ongoing development of the organisation.

**The Board**

The Board is made up of male and female members with diverse work experiences and backgrounds as business leaders and professionals. Whilst they share the Rotary ideals of service to the community they also bring their own beliefs and values to the governance of the club. The ability to contrast between managing in their workplaces and managing the club’ affairs provided opportunities to reflect on the different behaviours observed and tentatively develop explications for it.
Board members, as sponsors, played a critical role since their commitment to the project was important in motivating club members to collaborate in and contribute to what had begun as an unfamiliar process.

The researcher met with the Board on three occasions during the first cycle. The objective of the first meeting was to obtain approval to conduct the research and define the problem to be addressed. The use of brainstorming and ranking of identified issues led Board members to differentiate between problems due external\textsuperscript{24} as opposed to internal\textsuperscript{25} factors. External factors were put aside as difficult for the club to address in the short term whilst internal factors were identified as worthy of further exploration. Board members indicated being attracted by an approach to problem-solving dependent on the involvement of all club members since it is congruent with Rotary’s values\textsuperscript{26}.

A second and third meeting were held in August and October 2007, to provide the Board with progress reports, and obtain their comments on the direction taken by the research journey. They were encouraged to examine the data and contribute explanations for what it indicated. The emergence of a new reality with the acknowledgement that difficulty in recruiting new members had moved from being the problem to being a symptom of other problems is a prime example.

At the beginning of 2008, Board members were asked to review the situation and assess what had been achieved in the last six months since the project inception. The consensus was that the plan introduced in July 2007 had not produced the intended results. Their assessment indicated that whilst participants were in general agreement as to what had to be done this was not matched by the implementation of those agreed actions.

\textsuperscript{24} External factors included Rotary International’s rules such as the requirement for weekly meetings, the three Alice Springs Rotary clubs competing to attract new members from a relatively small population, and the societal changes working against people committing to a community service organisation such as Rotary.

\textsuperscript{25} Internal factors included the club structure and its processes. Motivation, succession planning, and delivering value to members were identified as factors within the control of the club.

\textsuperscript{26} The Rotary organisation strength is based on a membership drawn from business leaders and professional who combine their skills, knowledge and experience to deliver effective community service.
For example, the observations of those participants were:

- agreeing that the problem is serious but not treating it as urgent
- agreeing with the plan but distancing themselves from active involvement in its implementation
- identifying that communication is important but not asking questions when unsure as to the plan status or their role in it

Board members concluded that the plan should be reviewed and a different problem-solving approach introduced. The emphasis should be on participants accepting greater ownership of the actions and responsibility for their implementation. Coincidentally, the Rotary organisation had recently introduced a new club structure referred to as the *New Club Leadership Plan* which aims to address the operational effectiveness of clubs with low membership. The new structure takes into account a club’s human resources capacity and aims to improve effectiveness through better planning, improved communication and investment in leadership training. The new structure is congruent with the feedback from club members identifying leadership planning and communication as areas of the club’s practice that required attention. Board members expressed the view that whilst there was a reluctance to change the club structure in the past the situation was now different. The current low membership level and lack of success in recruiting new members had resulted in a reduced capacity that made it imperative to consider adopting the new structure.

The Board decision-making process was informed by the collaborative approach used to explore the issues faced by the club. The iterative nature of the process and validation of the new reality being constructed via the different data collection methods used, contributed to the emergence and acceptance that:

- the problem is real and will not go away or solve itself
- the problem is serious and if not addressed the club is at risk of losing it capacity to effectively serve the community
- the club’s current human resources cannot effectively support its present structure and processes
- the need for change has become imperative if the club is to build the capacity to continue operating as an effective community service organisation
The Board also acknowledged the influence of the project’s dual aims - to address both the current problem and the club’s capacity to address future problems through continuous learning\textsuperscript{27} - on the decision to introduce change. There was the emergence of a shared belief that the project had equipped the club and its members with the confidence to implement change and manage the risk and uncertainty associated with that decision.

\textit{The Reference Group}

The reference group met five times during the first cycle. At the first meeting it identified which issues may have been causing the current lack of success with membership recruitment. The group also discussed what had been done previously, the lessons learned and which criteria would effectively guide and gauge the effectiveness of the action research journey (Cherry 1999). The comment was made that planning to attract members was similar to planning to fish. When fishing, the type of fish being sought will determine the approach, equipment, and baits required. For the club to successfully recruit the new members it needed to grow its capacity and attract them with activities that would meet their needs. It was agreed the fishing metaphor would be useful to illustrate to club members the process being planned to attract new members.

Subsequent meetings provided forums to discuss the data collected, share observations and construct meaning from the results. One example is the fact that Club members distanced themselves from the problem, and consequentially its resolution, in the belief it involved addressing factors outside their individual control. This view was arrived at by comparing a number of data sources such as:

- information provided by members’ responses to questionnaires
- transcripts of individual interviews
- written journal observations
- reference group members sharing their observations

\textsuperscript{27} Refer to chapter 3 above and action learning.
Listed below are some general observations and reflections by reference group members on the involvement of club members. Their assessment was that participants had yet to turn the agreed plan into effective actions. For example:

- the leadership of the club has made it imperative for individual members to do something about recruiting new members, unfortunately the message has not sunk in yet
- concern that members are becoming scared to fail following repeated and unsuccessful approaches to invite people to join the club
- some strategies may work for other clubs and other countries but not suit our club and, we need to create the tension that will motivate members to change their behaviour
- determine what drives and motivates members: turn recruitment into a game and a competition and recognise club members who bring in a new member
- importance of working hard whilst having fun: our recruitment process has to be formalised but making it a fun process is important
- reinforce the positive: we need to build on good news

At the end of the first cycle the data captured confirmed the existence of what one group member referred to as a general malaise currently affecting the club. This malaise was identified with a lack of motivation, low morale and lassitude. It was also identified that a lack of knowledge, amongst club members, about the Rotary organisation in general and the club’s policies and programs in particular was compounding the problem.

The reference group also acknowledged the importance of differentiating between the problem’s causes as opposed to its symptoms, before attempting to address the malaise. It was now generally agreed that the problem was not so much the low membership level, as the behaviours and climate that impeded the recruitment of new members. However, whilst members had acknowledged the problem and identified ways to address it, they were still reluctant to be involved in actioning those

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28 This is in reference to the Rotary International organisation literature on how to recruit members and written to reflect the approach promoted by the parent organisation based in the United States of America.
measures. The expectation was that: *it will happen somehow and that somebody else will do it.*

This assessment was evidenced by the following observations:

- there was a reluctance on the part of individuals to take personal responsibility for recruiting new members
- the entire responsibility for recruitment was being thrown back at the President and the Board
- some members consciously or unconsciously were distancing themselves from the process
- some members had a negative assessment of the club’s contribution to the local community and acknowledged that it impeded them from recruiting new members. For example, a request for the club to organise *projects that will appeal to the broader community* ignored existing successful fund raising events and projects acknowledged as such by the local community.
- the apathy shown by some members was now having a greater impact on club capacity due to the reducing membership level
- it was the same members who had to carry the load associated with organising and managing the club’s programs. This is an important issue as there was a risk that they would eventually *burn out*. It attracted the following comments: *this is perpetrating the problem and placing the club in a downward spiral from which it is more difficult to recover a time goes by and it is now urgent to introduce some energy and purpose back into the club.*

The reference group also reflected on achievements and the more positive responses received in the context of, leadership, motivation, and problem-solving. For example:

- the leadership exercised by the President in implementing the recruitment plan was recognised and acknowledged by all club members
- the acknowledgment that applying a *Business Model* approach to the operation of local fund raising and community projects did produce more effective outcomes
- most members were asking for feedback on the progress being made indicating some interest in the implementation of the plan and the outcomes being achieved
• most members actively contributed ideas when asked for their opinion and participation
• generally members acknowledged being proud of the club’s achievements
• there was a willingness to be involved in community project activities with most members indicating feeling positive about their contribution

In conclusion, reference group members indicated the following statements to be representative of their assessment of the current situation:
• members exhibited a culture of passive participation and were reluctant to go too far outside their comfort zone, as illustrated by the comment that I am not the missionary type when discussing the requirement to approach people and highlight the benefits of Rotary membership
• members were active participants when asked to identify issues and formulate a plan of action
• however, they were also distancing themselves from the actions required to implement the agreed plan
• there was a distinction between the types of involvement and participation members are prepared to commit to:
  o members were willing to work on community projects
  o they were reluctant to become involved in club governance issues

An explication may be that the above behaviour is a reflection of the club’s ad hoc planning and training process and the failure to prepare members for leadership roles.

At the beginning of 2008 the reference group met to reflect on and assess the situation with the recruitment plan six months after its implementation. The club had only recruited one new member to date and the enthusiasm and interest shown when the plan was first implemented had been replaced by apathy. Whilst some group members indicated the plan could be given more time the consensus was that six months had been long enough and a review was necessary as the momentum seemed to have been lost. The group agreed that those concerns, based on the following observations, should be raised by the researcher at the next Board meeting.
• the data elicited from questionnaires filled by club members was not bringing up anything new and reference group members agreed that a level of saturation had been reached
• there was still a lack of commitment to implement the actions identified in the recruitment plan: whilst club members had achieved a better understanding and awareness of the seriousness of problem and what was required to address it, this was not reflected by participation in and implementation of the agreed actions. A reference group member reflected you can lead a horse to water but you cannot force it to drink.
• the data mined from questionnaires and interviews indicated participants generally agreed on the problem to be addressed whilst differing on how it was to be addressed. For example, respondents to questionnaires indicated that the problem was too difficult for individuals to address. By contrast, interviewees acknowledge it was up to them, as individuals, to address the problem.

At subsequent meetings the following assessment were made of the project and participants:
• the decision to change both the cub’s governance structure and processes had refocussed the attention of all participants and reinvigorated participation
• the implication of introducing a new concept had led to greater collaboration between and contribution from participants. The observation was made that the new governance model had removed the barrier between experienced and less knowledgeable club members. As a result the level of contribution had increased since all participants are equally new to the concepts identified with the change proposal.
• The introduction of change appeared to have increased confidence in and legitimacy of the process itself as reflected by the higher level of participation referred to above.

The reference group played an important role in the validation process by scrutinising the data for evidence and, when necessary, asking probing and challenging questions before accepting the emergence of local explanations. The position of the reference group as an intermediary between the Board and the
membership of the club provided the researcher with a third opinion with which to contrast those of the rank and file and leaders of the organisation.

**Club members**

*Meetings & Workshops*

Seven workshops were held with club members during weekly meetings in the first cycle of the research project. The club weekly meetings do not provide an opportunity for lengthy exchanges and on most occasions between 15 and 20 minutes was the maximum time available to the action research project. As a result those workshops were used to introduce questionnaires, provide feedback and garner comments on and interpretations of the data collected by the researcher.

The first workshop was conducted to introduce the project using Perry and Skerritt’s (1992) conceptual model showing the steps and cycles associated with action research. The involvement of all participants, including the researcher, in the research process was explained. The use of a diagram to illustrate and reinforce the spoken words was a very useful tool with which to explain a process club members were unfamiliar with.

The principles and values inherent with the process were shared with participants with an emphasis placed on:

- cooperation and collaboration between like-minded individuals able to bring their skills and experiences as business leaders and professionals to the benefit of the club
- the researcher whilst an insider and a facilitator was another participant in the process which would be controlled by club members who determined and owned the decisions taken to address the identified problem
- the process was a learning and development opportunity since the objective to address the identified problem through cooperative action was intended to equip participants with the knowledge to address similar problems in the future
Subsequent workshops involved brainstorming sessions, discussions, feedback on the data collected and presentation of emerging themes as identified by the Reference Group.

Information gathered from the workshops indicated:

- members recognised the problem and that something had to be done, however, this was not matched by any sense of urgency about the need to address it
- members expected the president and the Board to solve the problem
- the majority of members did not personally identify with the problem or believe they were able to assist in addressing it
- members were judging the club very critically and believed its image in the local community was slightly negative. Participants were asked if their assessment was based on actual feedback from the community or a perception by club members. The issue of subjectivity influencing responses to excuse a lack of motivation was also raised and discussed. The collective agreement was that club members have a tendency to construct an image of the club that was more critical of its performance than generally expressed by members of the local community.
- the view that weekly club meetings needed to be more engaging was an issue concerning every club member. For example, when members were asked if they had any questions or contributions to make at weekly meetings the offer was seldom taken up. Participants discussed what they could do to address the issue and accepted that it was up to every member to contribute more effectively. One participant used the metaphor of the Rotary emblem the Rotary Wheel to say that it was the responsibility of each member to contribute to making weekly meetings a rewarding experience.
- club members want more effective communication within the club. Board members returning a nothing to report, when asked about their portfolio, was used as an example of a lost opportunity to communicate. In response Board members felt that members could also assist communication by taking an interest and asking questions. This would motivate Board members to provide feedback

29 The Rotary emblem a wheel is fitted with a keyway to show that it is working and not idling. It is a metaphor used to communicate that every member of the organisation should be an active contributor and not a passive observer.
on what was happening within the club. The point was made that communication was a two way process and all club members needed to take an active part in that process if it was to improve.

Five workshops were conducted during the second part of the research cycle.

The information produced from the data collected through questionnaires was shared with club members to both inform them and seek their comments on what they thought it meant. This information was in turn used to reassess where the project was at and develop other layers of inquiry from which new explanations could emerge. The process was repeated until agreement on saturation was achieved.

Workshops provided effective forums to discuss concepts and ideas that had emerged from assessment made by the reference group. Workshop participants were able to progressively achieve a better understanding of:

- the problem and its impact on the organisation’s capacity to remain effective
- their role in the formulation of a plan to address the problem as well as the implementation of the plan
- the organisational and personal benefits of adopting a collaborative and participative approach to problem-solving

**Individual questionnaires**

Three questionnaires were handed out during the first cycle to explore issues and contrast group responses with more individual and anonymous comments. Those questionnaires and responses are at Appendixes C, D, and E. As indicated above, questionnaires resulted in contributors returning a more critical assessment of their individual responsibility as participants in the project. The anonymity associated with questionnaires, allowing respondents to be frank and open with their comments, positively contributed to the triangulation process\(^{30}\) and data validation.

\(^{30}\) Refer to validation in chapter 4 above
Five questionnaires were distributed as part of the second cycle of the action research journey and aimed at building on the data captured as a result of the first research cycle.

The questions and aggregated responses are listed at Appendixes, I, J, K, L and M.

The following comments were made when assessing the data collected from questionnaires:

- generally members were intent on continuing with the plan and giving it more time to produce results
- there was some acknowledgement that it was not solely the responsibility of the President to drive the recruitment process: this was recorded as a positive change.

There are some contradictory views expressed by members who both acknowledge their responsibility to implement the recruitment plan whilst giving reasons why they are not able to do so. The reasons given for members not acting on the plan confirms the information collected by other means: for example, members being reluctant to approach people who will say no to the offer to join the club. This corroborated the information provided during workshops and interviews.

- communication was still raised as an area requiring improvement. Members asked for more information to be provided on the actions taken and any results achieved, for example, the number of people approached for membership and the responses received.
- members believed that a successful recruitment plan depended on promoting the organisation in the local community. As Rotary was competing with other organisations for new members it needed to promote itself as relevant to the people targeted for membership. Members were using the fishing metaphor discussed above to illustrate that the club recruitment strategy needed to include communicating the benefits of membership to prospective members.
- another issue was that attendance requirements were very onerous on busy people who had many other competing demands on their time. Having to commit to too many hours could be a deterrent to some people joining the club or retaining members. Time-poor people had to be convinced that membership of Rotary was time well spent.
• many members expressed the view that they were not sales persons and not good at or comfortable with selling membership of the club in the community. This was useful information that needed to be taken into account when developing a recruitment strategy. The club had to identify who was able and willing to recruit new members and select the people best equipped for that task and offer them training in that area.

• form a specific sub-committee with the right mix of skills and experience to address the membership recruitment issue. The club needed to change the incorrect community perception of Rotary as an elitist and secretive organisation made up of older people. It would be easier to promote an organisation that was understood as offering value to its members and was also perceived as rewarding and fun. The club needed to emphasise the personal growth resulting from Rotary membership. For example:
  o attendance at weekly meetings was regarded as a rewarding experience
  o each member was a participant and not a spectator in the operation of the club
  o cater for busy people who were willing but time-poor
  o membership of the club was acknowledged as an opportunity for the individual and providing a benefit to the community

• the club needed to ask people why they became a member or decided not to become a member to make itself more attractive as per the fishing metaphor used earlier

• an increase in membership level would demonstrate that the club could implement a strategy and achieve its objective which would make members feel good about themselves, the club and its capacity to contribute to the community

Generally members were positive about the contribution made by the club whilst acknowledging that continued attrition would eventually have a negative impact on the capacity to maintain the current level of commitment. Club members also accepted having a responsibility to bring new members into the club. Most members
also indicated that not succeeding in bringing new members was a source of frustration to them.

All respondents identified the importance of managing change using a process of communication, evaluation and review. The following views were agreed to:

- leadership was about positioning the club to remain effective in a changing society whilst remaining true to the Rotary ideals of service
- the effectiveness of the leader was dependant on the level of support and participation demonstrated by followers
- giving members a greater involvement in the club’s planning process would increase members’ motivation to become more involved
- members acknowledged the relationship between operational effectiveness and organisational knowledge and believed that understanding what the organisation stands for was necessary to achieve the organisation’s goals

The last questionnaire asked members to comment on their level of understanding of the newly adopted New Club Leadership Plan. Interestingly, whilst most respondents indicated being clear about the aims of the newly introduced club leadership plan only half of them acknowledged understanding how the plan would work and their role in it. This led to another round of explanations on the New Club Leadership Plan and members’ role within it.

**Interviews**

A total of eight one-on-one interviews between the researcher and club members were conducted. The first three interviews occurred during the first cycle (*transcripts are at appendixes F, G and H*) and were followed by another five conducted during the second cycle (*transcripts are at appendixes N, O, P, Q, and R*). The earlier interviews were exploratory and intended to develop some understanding of the problem faced by the club as constructed in the mind of the participants. Subsequent interviews aimed to build on what had emerged previously and tentatively develop explanations that participants would identify with.
At the beginning of each interview a brief project update was provided, including some of the emerging findings from workshops and questionnaires. The intention was to leverage on the layers of data collected prior to the interview. Interviewees were then asked to think about what was happening within the club, reflect on it and explain it from their perspective. Interviewees were also encouraged to probe deeper into the data and develop a more critical and personal assessment of their role and influence on what was happening and why.

All interviews were designed and conducted to facilitate the emergence of new ideas by letting participants question their and others’ assumptions. For example they were asked:

- what do you think is the cause of this?
- why do you come to this particular conclusion?
- what response would address this issue?

The intention was to draw from a progressive analysis of the data and develop a process through which concepts and ideas would be open to challenge and refined as experience and knowledge was gained. The end objective was to reach saturation and provide another alternative source of information to assist the triangulation and ultimate validation of the data.

As with other interactions with participants, the use of metaphors helped to guide the interview process and gently probe deeper into the issues being examined. For example, the first layer of explanations was referred to as the tip of the iceberg whilst the research process was compared to peeling an onion to uncover the real issues at the core of the organisation.

**Journaling**

The research project was kept on track by keeping a journal which became both a record and a confidant during the journey. Writing the journal was a semi-structured process with specific events such as workshops and meetings and the ensuing observations and reflections being recorded. As the project unfolded subsequent
notes were written to capture the new ideas and concepts that emerged and provided a chronology of progress achieved by participants. The process became self-initiating with notes and reflections on particular events becoming launching platforms from which more reflections and ideas could surface until saturation was achieved.

The journal was divided in two main parts to record and reflect on the journey travelled by:

- club members as participants
- the researcher as both observer and participant

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the research journey was divided into two periods or cycles and journal entries followed the chronology of those cycles.

The entries made during the first cycle of the participative action research journey indicated a lack of familiarity with the process on the part of all participants, including the researcher: for example, surprise at the lack of curiosity shown by some participants at the implication of becoming involved in an action research intervention. This observation prompted the researcher to question the effectiveness with which the project was introduced and explained to all participants.

Explanations for the behaviour included:

- all participants had a clear understanding of the journey and its objectives
- the alternative was that some participants did not fully understand the process and were not prepared or interested to seek more information

As a result of this observation a greater emphasis was placed on explaining the process via metaphors and story telling. Those participants who had achieved some proficiency with elements of the process were invited to reflect and share their

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31 Extract from the journal: all members appear to accept the explanations provided as they did not ask questions at the end of the presentation. I can interpret the behaviour as indicating that:

- All members understand what has been explained and are keen to participate.
- Some members who do not understand are not prepared to say so in front of the group.
- Some members are not engaged and will not say so in front of the group.

I cannot help but reflect on how similar the behaviour shown by club members is to the behaviour I have encountered at work when new ideas or changes are introduced.
understanding of it with others. Subsequent notes identified the progress made as a result of this approach and the importance for the researcher engaged in a collaborative project of doing and acting through others.\textsuperscript{32}

Another journal entry noted the different levels of engagement observed between groups of participants such as members of the Board, the reference group, and the club in general. For example, members of the Board and the reference group demonstrated a greater level of participation than club members did as a collective. However, when members were approached individually, they also showed a greater willingness to contribute than they did as a group. The information was shared with participants and useful when engaging in particular aspects of the process and selecting the approach best suited to it, such as, using questionnaires to collect sufficient data from which to develop explanations that could be presented to the group for validation and developing action plans.

Writing down those observations prompted questions about the different levels of contribution and resulted in the tentative construction of explanations for what had been recorded. This was the beginning of an iterative process that involved a search for more data that could be used to validate or alter the interpretation of the original observations.

A benefit of keeping a journal was the opportunity to capture fleeting thoughts and casual observations. The ability to then read and share those entries as the journey unfolded was very important to the process of letting new ideas emerge. Often it was also necessary to contrast and question the interpretation of a particular comment or behaviour in order to validate those emerging ideas. Another advantage of having a written record was the opportunity to compare participant’s responses at different periods in the process and going back to look for behavioural shifts and emerging ideological change.

\textsuperscript{32} Extract from the journal: \textit{this observation has reinforced my understanding of the role of the action researcher/process consultant as a facilitator reliant on others as opposed to being the expert doing it all.}
For example, another early observation was that most initiatives were expected to come from the top. Members were not *walking the talk* and whilst they indicated being aware of the problems that will flow from low membership this was not translated into action to address the issue. There was an expectation that the Board would take care of the problem leading to the observation that club members *were willing followers but reluctant to lead*. As the project journey progressed, journal entries began to reflect a staged shift in attitude. The first step was marked by participants acknowledging they had a responsibility to contribute new ideas. The second step identified with participants adding the responsibility to act on and implement ideas to their role as contributors to the process.

The discourse of the journal during the first cycle of the research took the form of a dialog, an attempt to define the issues. The entries became reflective loops moving back and forth from participants to the writer in an attempt to narrow the actual problem.

In the second cycle of the research journey, journal entries indicated that participants were demonstrating a greater level of participation in and familiarity with the process. The journal entries recorded an increased level of engagement in the generation of new ideas directed at identifying ways in which the problem could be addressed collaboratively. It showed that participants were taking ownership of the process and acknowledged their responsibility to contribute to developing the organisation.

At a personal level, the harvest from the journal was rewarding since it allowed for the researcher original observations to germinate from seeds to fully grown ideas. For example it allowed the contrasting of the qualitative process of action research with the quantitative process of traditional research and noting the contribution made by both. In this instance the accumulation of qualitative data achieved by repetitive observations was found to reinforce the interpretation of the phenomenon for which explanations were sought and lead to validation through saturation.
Conclusion

The implementation of the methodology gave the research journey structure and reassurance when uncertainty was experienced. The iterative action research process and participants’ collaboration in that process eventually led to the capture of sufficient data to:

- reflect the diversity of views amongst members of the organisation
- contrast assumptions and agree on what was relevant
- develop explications endorsed by participants
- devise action plans accepted by participants

Overall, it allowed for the principles identified in earlier chapters to be tested in the field and assessed in the context of a real life organisational problem. This allowed for:

- a period, identified with the first cycle, of familiarisation, acceptance and engagement being necessary as a form of apprenticeship in the art of cooperative and collaborative action research
- a period, identified with the second cycle, in which the experience and learning achieved in the first cycle could be put into practice in the knowledge that from uncertainty new ideas and renewal would emerge
Introduction

The purpose of this study was to draw from the action research process to achieve the following three objectives:

1. Assist and observe club members manage an organisational problem,
2. Learn from the action component of the research to enhance participants’ knowledge and practice of problem solving.
3. Develop explanations, grounded in the data collected from the research, to better understand the specifics of the dynamics and behaviours involved.

Objective one - Assist and observe club members manage an organisational problem.

The adopted process was based on participants cooperating as a group to produce theoretical and practical outcomes that would address the identified organisational problems. The approach was reliant on participants practicing a methodology based on observation of both the self and others followed by reflection and the emergence of new ideas that would enable the construction of a more enabling reality.

The implementation was influenced by a number of factors such as the nature of the organisation and its people. The Rotary club was a complex amalgam from an organisational and human perspective.

As an organisation, the club is a member of Rotary International and bound by its parent rules and by-laws since a failure to comply could result in its charter being withdrawn. However, the club also had the ability to decide how it would operate locally and could exercise significant independence provided it did not contradict its parent organisation’s rules and by-laws. Both of those characteristics were a source of strengths and opportunities - *ability to adapt to its local environment* - as well as weaknesses and threats - *risk to become disconnected from the core values and beliefs of Rotary* - depending on club members’ knowledge and experience of the overall Rotary organisation’s operation.
As indicated above, the parent organisation, Rotary International, originated in the United States of America and many of its rules and policies reflect that country’s culture. Without a good working knowledge of those rules and policies - *why is it done that way? could we do it a better/our way?* - it was difficult for the club to optimise its local operation and effectiveness.

Some club leaders had implemented policies that could have been adapted to better suit and reflect the local needs and environment. By contrast, other members had changed policies that were core to what the organisation stood for. Those changes may have rendered life easier at the time but had the unintended consequences to reduce the organisation’s capacity over time. This resulted in the adoption of short-term policies which would negatively impact on the organisation in the long-term.

The decision by a previous club president to *do away with sub committee meetings and have all operational matters decided at the club’s weekly meetings* is a prime example. The aim to reduce the number of and time taken by meetings resulted in lost opportunities to debate issues, share specific knowledge, and mentor new members. That president, when interviewed, acknowledged the decision had contributed to a reduced club capacity to operate effectively\(^3^3\).

Another issue was that members of the organisation came from many different businesses and professions with the only common denominator being that they should be leaders in their fields and areas of work. This resulted in a membership made up of determined and decisive individuals with many diverse business and professional backgrounds and cultures. This diversity was sought by the organisation as a source of strengths; however, it also had the potential to create conflict and tension. Without knowledge of the organisation rules and policies to guide decisions there was a propensity for strong but inexperienced leaders to introduce changes that had a negative impact on club effectiveness. The decision to

\(^3^3\) See fourth interview, member ID05 at Appendix O – Relevant extract below:

> Now I wonder wether I am not directly responsible for that because when I was President in my usual very efficient way I decided that because we do meet once a week, that’s a big commitment anyhow, and rather than meeting on another occasion once a month with the Directors and their groups to discuss whatever it was that had to be discussed within the club but the reality of that is people are never there, the group you need to get together are never there at the same time and that is not to say the they would be there at a meeting called after hours but I just wonder wether that in a sense has undermined that process a bit and I rather suspect it might have.
nominate a new member without experience for a position on the Board was another example of expediency prevailing over good practice. Another former president acknowledged, when interviewed, the problems caused by putting new inexperienced members in leadership roles and compounding the issue by not providing them with adequate support.

Organisational climate

The majority of club members indicated their reason for joining Rotary was to serve the community with very few expressing an interest in managing the operation of the club. Participants, as business leaders and professionals, expressed the view that membership of the rotary club was also an opportunity to serve and have fun, to let the worries of work behind and relax whilst doing something worthwhile. As long as the club could retain and recruit sufficient members it was able to rely on a minority willing to manage its operation and let the majority do what they preferred to do. With its reduced membership capacity this was no longer practical and all members had to face a new reality demanding that they take responsibility for club operation as well as community service projects. However, associated with this reality was the fact that many of the remaining members had exercised or had been in leadership positions for a long time - and doing so out of a sense of duty, if I don’t do it nobody else will, as opposed to wanting to do it.

The situation where it was necessary to manage both membership attrition and a business and professional community that no longer aspire to join Rotary was something new for the club. The combination of those issues resulted in a significant paradigm change with the objective shifting from looking after community needs to looking after the club’s needs. Many members indicated having difficulties coming to term with this new reality and blamed causes outside their control for the problem. This attracted the comment from Reference Group members that members’ first response was to focus on the problem as opposed to addressing the issues.

34 See eight interview, member ID14 at Appendix S – Relevant extract below:
As a group we need to be conscious that if we haven’t got the resources ready to draw on we will not succeed. If we are going to put people into role and particularly as Directors or President elect and President’s position, we need to have some strategies to support them, particularly if they’re new folks. So I am not saying don’t put someone who is new in there but they should be prepared for the role they are expected to manage.
At the beginning of the project there was a sense of frustration and even resentment at community members for not being eager to join the club. Many club members blamed the problems faced by the organisation on external factors that they were unable to influence.

What emerged from the process of observation and reflection indicated that club members were aware of the seriousness of the situation the organisation was in as well as distancing themselves from it. The ostrich belief that it can escape imminent danger by burying its head in the sand was the metaphor used to describe the approach adopted by the majority of club members. A lack of effectiveness in the areas of leadership, planning, and communication was identified as the major reasons for the club’s capacity problem. Most participants also identified a cause and effect relationship between the above problem and the current low level of motivation within the club.

**Leadership**

Different aspects of leadership were raised by participants as issues to be addressed and included: leadership as a role, the motivation to lead, leadership as a catalyst to change, and leadership versus management. Leadership was the most discussed topic during the search for answers to the organisation’s problem.

**Leadership as a role**

Club members identified the lack of leadership from club leaders as an issue with the following comments extracted from the data:

- *the club needs leaders who will inspire and motivate members*
- *directors are not leading and driving the implementation of the club’s recruitment plan*
- *directors need to exercise the type of leadership that make members feel empowered*
- *we need leaders who are inclusive, and delegate*
Club leaders also identified a lack of preparedness to exercise situational leadership or become part of the club leadership succession plan by club members as an issue.

Their comments reflected the belief and assessment that:

- members are waiting for somebody else to do what has to be done
- former club leaders are reluctant to use their experience and lead as mentor or situational leaders
- some members do not lead by example in the areas of attendance at meetings and service work, bringing new members in the club, preparing for and accepting formal leadership roles as part of the club succession plan

In the literature, effective leadership is accepted as a social influence process exercised by people, organisations or countries with the aim to transform and benefit those associated with it (Bryman 1986; Kets de Vries 2001; Rost 1993; Yulk 2006). Leadership also assumes an intention to influence others to act in the direction chosen by the person doing the leading (Gardner 1995). Bass (1990) defines leadership as:

An interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perception and expectation of those members

(1990: 28)

When used in the context of a research project the term leadership must also take into account the specifics of the particular situation and process in which leadership is being observed (Kets D Vries 2001; Selznick 1957; Yulk 2006).

Participants in this research project identified two aspects of leadership, formal and situational leadership (Yulk 2006) as relevant to the organisation. Those were:

- leadership as a distinct role in the club such as President or Board member
- leadership as the manifestation of an influence process exercised and shared among club members

Both were considered to be critical since Rotarians as business leaders and professionals were expected to exercise formal and informal or situational leadership.
The paradigm in which leadership is vested in specific group members required those individuals to possess the attributes and demonstrate the behavior that would influence the overall group. Project participants were unanimous in their view that this formal leadership was expected from the President and Board members and necessary for the club to operate effectively.

By contrast, in a group where leadership is a shared process, leadership will be situational and exercised by the group member(s) best equipped to address the issue faced by the group at that particular time. Project participants identified that every member had a responsibility to lead using the specific knowledge, skills and experience he/she brings from his/her business and/or profession. They also agreed this type of leadership was necessary to the club’s effectiveness as a community service organisation.

What emerged from the research indicated:

- a lack of understanding of the Rotary governance model that is based on a membership drawn from business leaders and professionals taking turns to lead the club. A Rotary club has an unconventional governance model based on formal leaders rotating every 12 months. This is intended to leverage on the diversity of skills, knowledge, and experience its business leaders and professional members bring to the club. Another aim is to provide opportunities for all members to gain additional skills, knowledge, and experience as a result of being in a position of formal leadership.

- members who were not prepared to take their turn as formal club leaders or exercising situational and individual leadership. When asked why they had joined Rotary members usually responded: a desire to give something back to the community. However, the manner in which that objective was to be realised was too often identified with volunteering time at service projects and attending weekly meetings. The requirement that members contribute their knowledge, skills and experience as business leaders and professionals to build and maintain the club’s capacity was seldom associated as a responsibility of membership of the organisation.
Motivation to lead

The data collected indicated that some members were prepared to seek or accept a leadership role whilst many others were resisting or even refusing to lead and contented in the role of followers. What differentiated leaders from others content to be followers was an issue of interest when discussing and examining the motivation to lead the organisation.

In many organisations, leaders are compensated for the demands placed on them by receiving rewards and having access to advantages and privileges not available to other group members (Catano Pon & Kelloway 2001). This will act as an incentive for some group members to take a leadership role in the organisation. By contrast, there are no such compensations offered by voluntary organizations for the additional work and responsibilities their leaders have to carry (Pearce 1980). This situation was found to discourage or prevent many group members from participating in the organisation succession planning scheme, and eventually taking up a role as club leader. One group member indicated: being on the Board is hard work and you don’t get many thanks for it, so why would you want to do it?

- The data showed a lack of leadership ambition generally:
  - few members were willing to take up a position on the Board
  - members prepared to have a go were avoiding positions perceived as difficult, namely Treasurer, Secretary, and President
  - being a member had become a comfortable habit, you come along and help when asked to do so

- Erroneous expectations of leadership
  - leadership was a function exercised by others, not by me
  - leadership, from somebody else, would solve the club’s problems without me being involved

- Lack of preparation for leadership
  - today’s leaders were not mentoring the leaders of tomorrow
  - we set up people to fail by not giving them any training and then expecting them to run the ship
A survey of club members showed that those who had led the organisation were positive about the experience and their term as president had been very rewarding. By contrast, members who had not led the organisation were reluctant or not interested to become president, secretary, or treasurer and described those positions as too difficult. However, when probed further they usually associated that reluctance with not knowing what would be expected of them or the actual responsibility and duty of those positions. This confirmed/validated the emerging view that training and mentoring was a critical issue to the club attracting and developing leaders.

**Leadership as a catalyst to change**

Leadership is associated with the implementation of change (Dunphy & Stace 1992; Kets de Vries 2001; Kotter 1990; Plunkett & Attner 1986; Yulk 2006). When faced with a world that is constantly changing, leadership is a desirable phenomenon in organisations intent on remaining effective at what they do. However, as an organisation changes so does its leadership with a greater emphasis placed on participation and “…flexibility, innovation, and adaptation” (Yulk 2006: 5) - the new paradigm.

When discussing their expectations of club leaders, club members indicated:

- *we need leaders who are able to bring about change*
- *leadership is about positioning the club to meet the new challenges it faces*

At the beginning of the project change was not considered to be necessary. The objective was to find out why the successful ways of the past were no longer delivering the intended outcomes. The club was engaged in a downward spiral, losing members whilst continuing with a governance structure based on a larger pool of members than it had available. The outcome was that positions on the club’s Board were filled by the same members with the consequences that:

- the Board was losing its capacity to lead effectively due to long serving Board members feeling trapped in their role
the opportunity to introduce fresh ideas and provide opportunities for new members to learn and gain experience were lost as Board members’ renewal was not taking place.

As an organisation the club was operating under a mechanistic paradigm which had served it well in the past. The parent organisation, Rotary International, had covered most aspects of the operation of clubs across the world by issuing standard governance models, rules, and regulations. The club’s capacity to deliver outcomes had relied on both that standard governance model and sufficient members to fill the leadership positions necessary to its operation. This was a comfortable position for the majority of club members who were attracted to the concept of giving back to the community through voluntary work but did not aspire to take an active role in managing and building the club’s capacity to provide that community service.

The project provided an opportunity for club members to examine the situation the organisation was in, and identify why, through a process requiring them to differentiate between symptoms and actual causes. The adoption of a process based on a collaborative approach requiring participants to identify, list, and question their assumptions led to both the emergence of a new reality and its credibility. Participants were able to separate the values and principles that characterised the organisation and attracted them to become members from the structure and processes that had been accepted as the norm.

The decision to adopt a more organic governance structure was made in the second half (second cycle) of the project when the need for change became an accepted reality. The acceptance to depart from what was regarded as a familiar and comfortable situation was significantly assisted by the ten month iterative process and collaborative approach used to identify the new reality referred to above.

Significant to the decision was the acceptance of the need for club members to take a more active role in the operation of the club. The new governance model provided for:
• the fundamental values and principles associated with the organisation to be retained, with
• a structure and processes that would empower members to exercise a leadership adapted to reflect the local environment and aspirations

Leadership versus management

The literature reviewed offers two positions on leadership and management. One view is to separate the role of leader from the role of managers (Kotter 1990) whilst the other view considers leadership and management as essential attributes to effectiveness (Ket d Vries 2001). Leadership is distinguished from management by its capacity to influence and motivate people to change their attitudes and behavior (Kotter 1990; Rabey 2001; Yulk 2006). By contrast management is regarded as a less flamboyant activity where values such as “stability, order and efficiency” take precedence (Yulk 2006: 5). For management, continuity prevails over change and the influence of the manager will be related to a well-defined role within an established hierarchy with clearly established authority.

Many of the issues attributed to a failure of leadership by research participants were in fact related to ineffective management. For example:
• lack of good planning
• ineffective communication
• failure to share knowledge and mentor new members

At the beginning of the project there was a view expressed by many members that if leadership was addressed most of the club’s problems would be resolved. As the project evolved, participants identified that in many instances management issues were in fact the causes of the problems experienced by the club. Participants acknowledged that well-intentioned but misplaced leadership initiatives had contributed to the loss of club capacity.

When concluding this discussion on leadership it was acknowledge by participants that a definition of leadership was both subjective and influenced by the research
environment (Yulk 2006). This subjectivity concerning leadership was also extended to rating how effective a leader was and how that effectiveness would be assessed. Far more valuable was the concept of multi-faceted and shared leadership, inherent with the new governance model, dependent on:

- the club’s current leaders being expected to exercise formal leadership
- former leaders, as holders of the organisation corporate memory, being expected to share their leadership skills and experience with other members
- new members being expected to develop their knowledge of the organisation and leadership skills and participate in the club succession planning strategy

**Planning**

Planning is the difference between equipping an organisation to manage its environment as opposed to being reactionary to a changing environment (Robbins & Barnwell 1994; Plunkett & Attner 1986). The authors consider planning to be the primary function of management since formulating objectives and identifying what is required to achieve them will impact on all other activities of the organisation.

The majority of club members acknowledged that planning was necessary to prepare the organisation for the future and a failure to plan today was setting the organisation to fail tomorrow. There was a general acceptance that both problem identification and resolution would be more effective when using a collaborative approach to plan for organisational development (Harvey & Brown 1996).

Extracts from the comments made by club members on the issue of planning indicated a lack of:

- planning concerning club activities and projects
  - the club would benefit by adopting a business model
- succession planning
  - there was a lack of understanding concerning the operation of Rotary
  - the club must have a plan to mentor new members
  - older members must mentor newer members
- planning to maintain club capacity
recruiting new members had become critical
all members must be involved in the club’s planning process
the various plans i.e., recruitment, community projects, fund raising must be reflected in the club’s overall strategy
planning without a commitment to the plan including being prepared to contribute to its implementation would be a waste of time

As with leadership, the discussion concerning the role of planning and its impact on capacity highlighted the importance of applying the same approach to the operation of the club as members did in their businesses and professions. Another important outcome of the collaborative approach taken was to identify that by involving club members in the planning process the organisation would also address other issues such as ineffective leadership and communication. The newly adopted club governance model was intended to achieve this objective by devolving tactical leadership and planning to specific club members whilst leaving the more strategic planning issues to the club’s Board.

**Communication**

The greatest obstacle to effective communication is “the illusion that it as occurred when in fact it has not.” *(Downs Linkugel & Berg 1977: 32)*. Communication is a dynamic process involving multiples exchanges between at least two parties who are expected to alternate in the roles of sender and receiver *(Down Linkugel & Berg 1977; Plunkett & Attner 1986)*.

The issue of communication was often raised as impeding the club’s effort to build on its capacity. Participants identified the club was failing to communicate effectively both internally and externally.

Comments on internal communication included:

- club Leaders needed to communicate more effectively
  - directors and the Board are not providing regular feedback to club members
o club leaders are not meeting regularly with their committee members
o directors were not always including their committee members or keeping them informed of what was going on

• communication was restricted to social matters with little communication on Rotary as an organisation
  o it was important to inform members on a wide range of topics from club administration to club projects
  o there was a lack of awareness concerning Rotary governance, objectives, and operation
  o members must also make it their objective to find out about Rotary and the club
  o we do not ask why people join Rotary
  o it was important to communicate what good work the club does for the local community

• weekly club meeting must be used for more effective communication
  o members do not communicate past the table they are sitting at with some always sitting with the same members
  o members do not always share information with other members, such as, more experienced members with new members
  o some members rarely have much input
  o members do not always pay attention to speakers/presenters or engage with them

Comments on external communication were directed at the club and members not taking advantage of available opportunities to market/promote the organisation in the local community. For example:

• the club must have a marketing strategy to promote what it does
• what Rotary does is a well kept secret
• members do not promote the organisation by wearing their Rotary pins

During the project some of the commonly identified blockages to effective communication affecting participants were:

35 Rotarians are required to wear a lapel pin to signify their membership of the organisation, a practice that is often not followed.
• hearing the message they wanted to hear and blocking what did not appear relevant or was inconvenient to them
• dismissing information that was in conflict with their assumptions and construction of reality

Gestalt theory was also very relevant when aiming to assess the impact of individual communication on the overall group (O’Sullivan et al. 1983). The tendency to concentrate on the collective message, as opposed to individual communication, made it difficult to identify where exactly the problem was. This was shown to be the case when participants collectively identified ineffective communication as an issue but were less prepared to share their criticism with other participants. For example, younger members would not indicate feeling hurt when presenting information and not being taken notice of36.

Motivation

Whilst motivation was acknowledged as very important to achieving optimum performance it was also recognised that what motivates people to perform will vary and be influenced by factors such as personality, culture and circumstances (Berry 1998; Finkelstien 2009; Westwood 1993; Stukas Worth Clary & Snyder 2007).

In the context of this research, various motivation theories were taken into account. However, since the environment in which a community service organisation members performed was different to paid work, what motivated volunteers was of specific interest (Nassar-McMillan & Lambert, 2003; Wilson & Pimm 1996). Another area of interest was to investigate if there was a difference between what motivates unpaid volunteers as opposed to volunteers who have to pay to join a community service organisation37.

36 See seventh interview, member ID20 at Appendix R – Relevant extract below:
Everything is discussed in a sentence or two, there is no sharing between the groups and other times someone may be talking about a topic, and this is my personal view, but you may have a group talking about a completely different issue and not listening to the topic that the other person is presenting and for me this is very annoying.

37 See discussion on leadership above
Of the many motivations theories available from the business world, Maslow, Herzberg, and McClelland (Berry 1998; Plunkett & Attner 1986; Westwood 1993) have been selected for review in the context of this action research project.

Maslow’s needs hierarchy theory is well known and whilst often referred to when discussing motivation in organisation, its applicability has been questioned (Berry 1998). The author quotes Wahba and Bridwell (1973) whose studies indicated that of the behaviours identified by Maslow only the need for self-actualisation could be supported.

In the context of this action research project, love and self-actualisation needs that incorporate needs associated with self-confidence, respect from others, self-fulfilment, and personal growth provided useful links with the study. Wilson and Limm (1996: 26) specifically identify “…social needs - belonging; ego needs - self esteem; self fulfilment” with volunteers’ motivation.

Similarly, Herzberg’s two-factor theory’s popularity appeared to be limited to industry (Berry 1998) and in common with Maslow’s theory, was not found to be entirely relevant to the particular environment and participants involved in this project. It was its second tier, dealing with motivation factors associated with personal growth and development, achievement, recognition, and responsibility that best related to motivation in a community service organisation.

By contrast, McClelland’s achievement theory (Berry 1998; Plunkett & Attner 1986) provided the best behavioural fit to the research through its two related needs for:

- gaining success
- avoiding failure

McClelland’s achievement theory (Berry 1998; Plunkett & Attner 1986) identifies a high achiever with the following traits:

- motivation is with achieving success, as opposed to being rewarded for it
- taking personal responsibility, as opposed to leaving it to somebody else
- planning for achievable goals
- seeking rapid and honest feedback on performance
Those behaviours and traits were found to effectively support an action research methodology and its iterative cycles of planning, implementation and assessment/reflection. Participants, as committed individuals, could identify and be motivated by a process aimed at personal and organisational development.

Heider (1958) (cited in Berry (1998)) identifies that factors associated with both behaviour and the environment will influence an individual to act. He also indicates the motivation to act will be reinforced by the belief that he/she has the required capacity and the objective is achievable. Fig 2.1 below reproduces the components of performance identified by Heider (1958) (cited in Berry (1998)). The model provided a useful tool in the context of this action research by identifying the type of self evaluation an individual or group performs before deciding to act. It was also well suited to this study as it offered opportunities for learning needs and environmental constraints to be identified and addressed as part of the iterative cycles characterising action research (Cherry 1999; McNiff & Whitehead 2006).

Figure 6.1 – Performance model

Stukas et al. (2007: 6) offer that volunteers’ satisfaction and participation can be achieved when “volunteers’ important motivations for service are paired with features of the environment that allow them to engage those motivations”. Those
features of the environment include the type of activities and role the volunteer performs as well as the organisation itself.

Since membership of the club was a personal choice and separation, as opposed to changing job, unlikely to cause any hardship to the individual concerned, matching motivation and environmental factors was critical to both recruitment and retention. Participants identified the requirement for the club to communicate what it stood for and the different roles individuals were expected to play to achieve the organisation’s objectives as critical to motivating current and prospective members.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To express important values</td>
<td>Genuine personal concern about the service the organisation provides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To better understand the world and its people</td>
<td>Through volunteering I have an opportunity to get ‘hands on’ experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For positive self-enhancement</td>
<td>Volunteering makes me feel I am needed and doing something worthwhile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection against guilt, self-doubt, and other negative feelings</td>
<td>No matter how bad I have been feeling, volunteering helps me forget about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To fit into one’s social reference group</td>
<td>I value being part of a group of people who share an interest in community service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To obtain career skills and responsibility</td>
<td>Volunteering will add to my career prospects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6.2 – Motives to volunteering Clary et al (1998) (cited in Stukas et al. (2007: 6)) and Finkelstien (2009)*

The above motives were identified with a functionalist approach to motivation and related to “community involvement and service” (Stukas et al. 2008: 6). Motives
such as social order and integration, consensus, solidarity, and need satisfaction also indicated a commitment to a functionalist/interpretive paradigm associated with sociological positivism (Burrell & Morgan 1979).

Project participants indicated a strong identification with motives one, three, and five whilst acknowledging a lesser identification with motives two and four. Motive number six was not identified by participants as being something they would associate with membership of the club.

This was in contrast with the parent organisation Rotary International regarding motive number six as an opportunity of Rotary membership. This was discussed as an area the club should pursue to attract younger members interested in developing their leadership potential. Such an approach was also congruent with the club’s identification that training and mentoring new members to become future club leaders was necessary to build and maintain capacity.

**Objective two - Learn from the action component of the research to enhance participants’ knowledge of and practice of problem solving.**

Participants generally acknowledged their knowledge and practice of problem-solving using a collaborative approach had benefited from their involvement in the action component of the research and the associated learning. This was best manifested by the change of behaviour observed within the group over the course of the project. Congruent with the problem-solving approach adopted the action learning was incremental and related to the project cycles.

- **First cycle** and the importance of:
  - identifying and targeting the causes of the problem as opposed to its symptoms
  - accepting personal responsibility for addressing the problem: *it is up to me, not somebody else*
having a systematic and coordinated approach based on an identified process understood by participants

Workshop discussions and brainstorming sessions resulted in participants sharing openly their assumptions. The process was assisted by the level of trust existing amongst participants and between participants and the researcher. Listing issues and analysing those led participants to go past the representations of the problem and allow the actual causes to emerge.

An important achievement of the approach was to allow participants to understand that the problem had developed slowly over a period of time. A lack of investment in leadership training, planning and communication had caused the current situation. The necessity to have a training/succession plan in an organisation changing its leader and Board members every twelve months was reinforced amongst participants. The group discussions also allowed participants to better understand their organisational governance model and the strengths and opportunities associated with having a membership drawn from business leaders and professionals. For example:

- the strengths of an organisation able to draw from the knowledge and experience of a membership made up of business leaders and professionals from diverse backgrounds
- the opportunity to develop members by leveraging on the strengths identified above and giving them leadership roles in the organisation

However, with the slow but regular loss of members over recent times participants also acknowledged the need for a critical review of its approach. The positives features associated with the traditional Rotary governance model, as described above, had developed into negatives outcomes for the club. The continued reliance on a structure and processes based on new members taking up leadership positions without providing the necessary training and preparation needed to support the model was a prime example. As a result new members without the relevant knowledge and experience had been expected to lead the organisation and unwittingly contributed to the current loss of capacity.
The identification that leadership, planning, and communication, were issues having an impact on the organisation provided participants with the opportunity to openly discuss and explore why and how this was so. This iterative process contributed to the development of a better understanding of the relationship between those issues and their influence on motivation and capacity. Achieving a shared understanding as a result of adopting a collaborative approach to problem solving and organisational development was also acknowledged as highly beneficial by and to participants.

- **Second cycle:** the following changes in the position of participants reflected the learning achieved as a result of the first cycle:
  - participants had accepted that to address the problem they had to become more involved in identifying responses to that problem
  - participants had accepted that the status quo was no longer an option and change was required to develop the organisation out of its current predicament
  - participants identified with the role of change agents and the requirement to move from spectators to actors

The acceptance of what constituted the causes of the problem - *I have to do something about it and not wait for somebody else to do it*, and be prepared to become personally involved - represented a significant milestone in the action learning process. This unleashed new resources and energy that could be directed at developing the organisation. An increased preparedness to contribute to the development of new ideas, their validation, and implementation was a manifestation of this greater level of participation.

This emerging awareness of the role and contribution each participant was able to make to develop the organisation was captured in the pictorial metaphor below.
The participants achieved learning from the following actions:

- **collaboration** between participants who achieved a common understanding of the problem, its causes and the remedial actions required to address it
- **reflection** from individual, between individuals and collectively as an effective method to let new ideas emerge
- A greater individual ownership and participation in the implementation of change from which further learning was achieved

The shift from a position where the club’s Board was held solely responsible to the acceptance of a collective responsibility to address the problem was a significant step. It contributed to the identification of remedial actions that would be endorsed and implemented by all the people involved. More importantly it had allowed club members to experience and become aware of the contribution a collaborative process could achieve for the organisation and the individuals involved. The experience of having developed a common response to an organisational problem had also equipped club members with the confidence to address similar problems in the future.
**Objective three - Develop explanations, grounded in the data collected from the research, to better understand the specific of the dynamics and behaviours involved.**

Data collection was achieved by using workshops, questionnaires, interviews, and journal entries. This eventually produced sufficient information to satisfy the requirements of qualitative research and the need to capture as many contributions as feasible from participants in the project.

Data capture was assisted by the collaborative approach adopted, an observation validated by the level of contribution increasing as the project gained momentum. Participants indicated that the building blocks and iterative approach used in the project encouraged comments and prompted the emergence of different perspectives that could be added to the previous layer of data. As participants became more familiar with the process their affinity with and ownership of it also increased and encouraged the production of more data until theme recurrence appeared to signal when saturation had been achieved.

Questionnaires provided the first set of data from which a picture of the problem, as perceived by participants, could be drawn and reflected back to them. Participants indicated the anonymity of questionnaires resulted in an open and candid assessments of the problem that may not have occurred under different conditions. When that unfettered data was provided for comments during workshops it facilitated the brain storming process intended to refine the data. The approach allowed the group the opportunity to openly reflect on a wide range of opinions and ideas and gave the researcher some reassurance that the net had been cast as widely as possible.

The data collected via interviews also benefited from the approach since participants were able to draw from the collective data to inform their assessment of the situation and contribute their personal comments. Interviews provided the researcher with a more precise instrument with which to probe and question the collective information that had emerged from the questionnaire and workshop data collection process described above.
Data interpretation and validation relied on the input of workshops participants, focus group members, Board members and the researcher. The many contributors to the interpretation and validation process gave local legitimacy to the process. The construction of meanings for the behaviour displayed by participants reflected the emergence of a reality reflecting both the individual and collective membership of the club.

As with the data capture process referred to above, its analysis and interpretation also relied on collaboration and iteration to let locally relevant meanings emerge. The agreement that the original causes of the problem were only symptoms of a deeper problem is a prime example of how the process contributed to identifying relevant information.

The following diagram/picture was used to show participants the data gathering and analysis/interpretation process.

**Figure 6.4 – Diagram/picture of data collection and analysis pathway**
**Conclusion**

Collaboration, trust and an approach encouraging participants to observe and reflect on both their individual and collective assumptions of the problem faced by the organisation delivered the intended project objectives. Club members:

- actively participated in the project and contributed to the implementation of measures that would lead to the adoption of a new governance model
- learned the value of adopting a collaborative approach when addressing a complex organisational problem. The original evaluation of the problem was replaced with a new reality when observation and reflection contributed by participants identified the actual causes of the organisation loss of capacity.
- Contributed rich data from which local explanations for the organisation predicament could be developed
CHAPTER 7

EMERGING THEORY
Introduction

An important objective of the project design was to capitalise on the emergence of issues, as a product of the participants’ collaborative efforts, to inform a process intended to develop explanations or local theories for what had happened.

What does the research explain

At the beginning of the action research intervention all club members accepted that club capacity was influenced by its human resource capital. Club members also acknowledged that the current membership level was too low and recruiting new members had become critical to both capacity and survival. However, when asked why the club had difficulty in recruiting new members, participants identified external factors outside their control as causes. Issues such as: people are too busy; the club is not projecting a sufficiently attractive image or membership of Rotary is too onerous, were offered.

When asked to question their assumptions, club members began to identify internal factors related to club’s practices in the areas of leadership, planning and communication. Club members also perceived those internal issues to be outside their immediate influence and responsibility. Initially, ineffective leadership, planning, and communication were identified as a responsibility of the club’s Board and president. This was strongly expressed when the first recruitment strategy did not work despite all members being involved in formulating and endorsing the strategy.

The denial by individual that they had an important role to play in addressing the problem lasted until the end of the first cycle of the action research intervention.

A change was observed during the second cycle when individuals began to acknowledge they had a role and responsibility to address the club’s problem. Similarly it also took some time before all members accepted individual responsibility for effective leadership, planning and communication within the club. This led to the emergence of an awareness of a link between members’ willingness to
take responsibility for addressing the problems and the motivation and energy to do so.

This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

Subjectivity can allow people to construct a different and less confronting image of a reality in which problems are conveniently assigned to causes outside their control. Submitting individual assumptions to the evaluation of others act as a filter through which more realistic assessments can emerge. Taking and assigning responsibility for addressing a problem will be enhanced by implementing a process of collaborative reflection between the individual and the collective concerned.

Contribution of the research to and understanding of the problem

A feature of the project was its pertinence to the actors and settings that contributed to the body of data from which explications for what was being observed would emerge (Charmaz 2000; Herr & Anderson 2005). In this instance, the interest was to posit why business leaders and professionals equipped and experienced with addressing capacity issues in their places of work did not do so as members of the community service club. More specifically, the behaviour affecting leadership, planning and communication were examined with the aim to offer local theory or explanation for the data and observations discussed in previous chapters.

Building capacity

Capacity for the community service club was reliant on having the membership to manage its operation, raise funds to finance community projects, and provide the labour to deliver those projects. Membership of a Rotary club, up until recently, offered prestige, a network, and the opportunity to become involved in a multiplicity
of local and international activities. Those benefits had provided sufficient incentives to attract the business leaders and professional from whom the members of a Rotary club are drawn - benefits that had to be weighted against the time and financial commitment associated with membership. However, more recently there had been an attitudinal change due to business leaders and professionals facing increasingly competing demands for their time. Also relevant to the time dilemma, opportunities to network and contribute to a ‘good cause’ can now be achieved without having to invest the amount of time associated with Rotary club membership.

The changes discussed above had taken some time to have an effect on the Rotary club, its membership level and capacity. Not unlike the experiment where a frog placed in a pot of water will not escape death if the water temperature rises slowly, the Rotary club had not, until now, realised the seriousness of the situation it faced. The slow temperature rise was an appropriate metaphor for the gradual loss of club capacity. In the context of this intervention it explained why the club was in its current predicament and did not develop a strategy to manage its loss of capacity earlier.

This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

As membership level gradually decreased, the Rotary club’s capacity to be effective was reduced without the problem being treated as serious enough to require attention. Instead the organisation adapted to its reduced capacity and progressively entered in a comfortable downward spiral in which acknowledging the problem as serious was avoided. There was a ‘head in the sand’ approach toward the problem before the action research project began. It was only after implementing the decision to collaboratively assess the problem and its impact that the organisation and its members were able to acknowledge the need to seriously address it.
Leadership

Leadership in an organisation whose membership was drawn from business leaders and professionals was expected at all levels. Rotary International identifies its strength with a membership made up of leaders who bring to the organisation a capacity to exercise both formal and informal leadership. However, this was not reflected in the earlier data provided by club members. They appeared content to be followers and had constructed a reality in which the reason for the club’s predicaments was attributed to a lack of leadership at the top of the organisation.

When asked to reflect on the leadership issue and the relationship between leader and followers many members expressed the view that it was up to the leader to find answers to organisational problems. The earlier expectation that the president would drive a process out of which new members would magically appear was a prime example of this prevailing view. Whilst this attitude started to change during the second cycle there was still an expectation by some members that only leadership at the top can resolve the club’s entire predicament.

Assessments, observations, and notes made by the researcher and focus group members indicated the situation was related to a lack of mentoring and training within the club. As reported in previous chapters the data points to the club not adequately informing members of the process leading to Board membership and presidency of the club. This was especially felt by younger members who were willing to take up such positions provided they understood both what is involved and expected of them. Those younger and less experienced members also highlighted the paucity of training and information available from the club. The data showed there was a lack of motivation and energy from some older and experienced club members who were not prepared to mentor the next generation of club leaders. All of this was happening despite the Rotary International organisation's very comprehensive information and training programs available to its membership. Club members could access information on the organisation’s history, rules, and objectives as well as leadership training. However, the research indicated that information and training programs were not sufficient by themselves without the commitment of experienced members willing to share their leadership experience and mentor prospective leaders. What emerged was the requirement for the club to develop a local culture that would
acknowledge the importance of training and education programs. Comments were made that members with leadership attributes had also unintentionally contributed to the current situation due to a lack of preparation to the role of club leader as Board member or president. The finding was that individuals who are willing to stand for office but have not been adequately prepared for it or effectively guided and supported when in the position would be unlikely to succeed. As one participant indicated we set people up for failure by not preparing them for leadership.

This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

**Effective leadership for a Rotary club is dependent on a planned process in which incumbents are prepared for the role of leader. It is not sufficient to be willing; the leader has to also be informed of the organisation history, rules and objectives before he or she take office. A lack of preparedness is likely to result in well intended members unintentionally leading the organisation into problems. Leadership has to occur at all levels of the organisation and can be exercised formally and informally by different members depending on circumstances. Leadership provides individuals with opportunities to contribute; it is not to be used to blame others (for not exercising it) when we want to avoid personal responsibility.**

**Planning**

The French writer Antoine De Saint-Exupery\(^{38}\) posits that; a goal without a plan is only a wish (De Saint-Exupery 1957). In addition, the research has shown that a plan that was not aimed at fulfilling an objective that was both understood and shared would not succeed. As business leaders and professionals, club members were familiar with the importance of planning to achieve organisational success. Rotary clubs are required to provide annual plans to their District leader and the Rotary

\(^{38}\) Antoine De Saint-Exupery, 1900-1944.
International organisation conducts training and planning days in preparation for this. Club members had indicated that whilst the club makes annual plans to cover the year ahead it was too often only a wish-list of worthwhile activities. Comments from participants indicated they judged such planning to be from the heart and not from the head with the result that many items on the plan would not be implemented. This negatively affected motivation since members who were interested in the unrealised activities lost interest and planning was no longer credible. The yearly plan was consciously or unconsciously relegated to a tick the box exercise. Planning was done for its own sake, to produce a plan and meet the club requirement to do so, as opposed to being a process that would deliver positive outcomes. For example future activities should only be identified on the plan after the club had determined it had or would have the resources necessary to go ahead with it. As one member indicated, we should apply a sanity check to our planning process and if we are not sufficiently motivated or have the necessary resources to make it happen then what is the point? The club had to be honest with its planning process and not create wish lists that were pie-in-the-sky: for example, committing the club to a community project without consulting with members and securing the resources required to meet that commitment. The consequence of this lack of planning resulted in only a few members being available to meet the undertaking for assistance promised by the club. Those volunteers had to contribute significantly more of their time to the project than they would have been required to if more members had been available.

Members had also given examples of opposite situations when volunteers were called to assist with a project and too many people had turned up with the result that some members had nothing to do. The consequence of not identifying the resources needed prior to calling for volunteers was that some club members would not be prepared to contribute their time when future requests were made for assistance with service projects.
This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

For planning to enhance the organisation’s effectiveness, it has to follow a process in which club members collaboratively identify, agrees on, resource and implement club’s goals. A failure to adequately plan will not only prevent the club from fulfilling its role as a community service organisation it will also negatively impact on members’ motivation. For a service organisation relying on time poor business leaders and professionals planning effectively is critical otherwise members will lose interest and not maintain the level of commitment necessary to achieve optimum club capacity.

**Communication**

Interactions between participants in the project had shown that a human being’s ability to communicate was a mixture of strength and weakness.

- **Strength**, since effective communication was a prerequisite to the exchange of ideas and information that informed the planning process, and promoted collaboration between the people involved
- **Weakness**, since ineffective communication would often result in unintended consequences, such as misleading or erroneous information and disagreements between the parties

The data collected during the research showed that participants identified good communication as critical to effective leadership and planning. Club leaders were accused of not adequately communicating their intentions and decisions to the membership. As indicated above, Rotary International had considerable information available to the membership of Rotary clubs but too often club members were unaware of its existence or where it could be accessed.
The research data also indicated some concerns at the lack of informative and constructive exchanges between members and by members with the Board. Whilst all members indicated the club to be a friendly organisation made up of likeable individuals, many members also wanted the club’s weekly meetings to provide more than superficial exchanges. Often members indicated that whilst pleasurable, having a weekly breakfast can become tedious unless it delivers the outcomes they identified with membership of the club. Some new members felt that long serving members were not using weekly meetings as an opportunity to share their knowledge with them. Long-serving members were also identified with the use of acronyms, a practice that did not assist communication since newer members could not relate to the information being provided. Finally, the data identified that some members were concerned by the lack of etiquette and courtesy during club meetings. This was related to some members not paying attention or talking whilst a member or a guest speaker was addressing the club.

This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

**Without effective communication between club members, leadership and planning will be unlikely to succeed in delivering club capacity. Effective communication is also necessary if the club is to provide an environment where members can feel included and experience a sense of belonging to the organisation. Effective communication is critical to the successful internal operation of the club, its image, and standing in the community.**

**Contribution of the research to the introduction of change**

When the action research intervention commenced the change sought by the club was to increase its membership level. However, members did not identify a need to change current club practices and thought the action research project would by itself deliver the desired membership increase. The iterative approach taken and reflected by conducting two cycles contributed to the acceptance that change was necessary.
The first cycle of the action research project reaffirmed the view held by many that responsibility for addressing the problem was with the Board of the club and not with them. By avoiding accepting the severity of the problem and become personally involved the need for change was not contemplated by club members.

The second cycle benefited from the experience gained in the first cycle and provided a powerful justification for the need to change a process that had not delivered the intended outcome. The proposal that it was now necessary for the club to try a new approach became easier to promote. The acceptance that a change had to be introduced was also facilitated by having a pause over the Christmas and New Year holiday period. This break gave club member the time to reflect on the experience and outcome of the first cycle. The reduced membership level was also starting to have an impact on the operation of the club and its capacity to deliver community project requiring human resources.

Another factor facilitating the notion that change was necessary was the availability of a new club governance model called the Club Leadership Plan. The problem of low membership and reduced capacity was not only experienced by this club but a problem common to other Rotary clubs. Adopting a change structure promoted by Rotary International and implemented by other clubs looking at ways to increase their capacity offered some comfort to club members. Also seen as a benefit was the fresh start associated with a change that comes with comprehensive information on how it was to be implemented and expected to work. The change provided an opportunity to include all members, new and long serving, in learning about the new Club Leadership Plan.
This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

Before members of a volunteer organisation such as a community service club consider change, they must accept that doing nothing will eventually be more threatening than introducing that change. For club members to be motivated to change they must also personally identify with the problem and understand the impact that implementing change versus doing nothing will have on them. Similarly the change being introduced, including its process, must be sufficiently understood for individual members to know what is expected of them and how their action(s) will contribute to the collective goal.

Contribution of the research to participants’ practice and knowledge

At the beginning of the action research project club members had acknowledged that a low membership equated to low capacity and this had to be addressed. Amongst the project objectives a number of learning outcomes had been identified. Those were: learning how to identify and address the problem, and how to avoid a similar problem in the future.

As the project unfolded other learning opportunities emerged, such as learning how to work collaboratively using action research. Another opportunity was to learn about the organisation, other participants and the self from the iterative action research process.

If I do not know I have a problem then I do not have a problem aptly reflected the situation the club and many of its members believed to be when the project began. Members’ knowledge of the organisation was limited resulting in processes that are aimed at recruiting new members not being implemented and the mentoring of new members not taking place. During the project many perceived shortfalls in club
operation and practices were identified by participants who sought guidance on how to manage such issues. In the majority of cases, Rotary already had information and processes available to its members on how to manage those issues: for example, how to recruit new members and how to provide them with the information they require to understand how the organisation operates. This information would be aimed at developing new members and more importantly provide them with a sufficient understanding of the organisation to make them feel part of it. The data collected as part of the research identified that well-intentioned new members placed in leadership positions made up the rules as they went along when unaware of the existing rules. An outcome of the research was to raise the awareness of the vast amount of organisational information available and encourage members to ask questions and share information.

This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

The operating rules and principles of the organisation should be regarded as keys to opening doors leading to greater opportunities. Knowledge of those rules and regulations will empower members, to adapt or change them, when necessary, to build and maintain the organisation's capacity. By contrast, ignorance of the rules and regulations will result in ill informed decisions that will be detrimental to the organisation's long term capacity to remain effective.

Another learning outcome related to collaborating in the action research and becoming aware of the potential of such a methodology to identify problems, devise remedial plans and implement, reflect and review those plans: learning how to compensate for subjectivity by leveraging on the input of other participants to identify problems and formulate responses that would better reflect the local reality.
Participants also learned how to observe and reflect on a situation individually and collectively. A new set of skills aimed at equipping club members to better manage the issue of membership and capacity in the future.

This led to the emergence of the following local theory:

Of all the preceding local theories grounded in the research data, learning for the organisation and its members has a greater potential to be generalised due to its reliance on action research and learning. The research demonstrated that despite having a considerable amount of information available to its members, the majority only had a limited knowledge and understanding of its operation and objectives. For example:

- the requirement that sponsors be responsible for the mentoring of new members
- the expectation that every member would exercise leadership, promote the organisation, and sponsor new members

The action element of the project contributed to the realisation that doing is learning and the process is strengthened when shared amongst participants. A learning community actively draw from the experience of the past to inform its future and the Rotary club now realises that having learned how to learn it must now continue to include all members in the new learning paradigm.

Area for future research

- Implement an action research project involving other community service organisations to contrast different memberships make up and cultures.
Examine the potential of action research and more specifically its action learning component to address succession planning in the context of an organisation renewing its Board membership every twelve months.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter on local theory was to produce explanations for the data collected during the action research project. Local theory grounded in the data as the outcome of the methodology applied to this action research project. Whilst local, the theory is, however, open to explain in part similar situations involving Rotary clubs experiencing a loss of capacity caused by a reduced level of membership. This is due to Rotary clubs operating as subsets of a well established international organisation which promote leadership, planning and communication through training and information.

More specifically the following local theory has emerged from the contributions and collaboration of participants in the research project:

- **Before an organisational issue or problem can be successfully addressed, it must be identified for what it is and why by all of those affected.**
- **In a Rotary club, leadership is to be exercised formally by elected leaders and informally by all members in the execution of their responsibilities as Rotarians.**
- **For planning to be effective it must be carried out collaboratively, optimise the club’s people and financial resources, and deliver club and community outcomes that will enhance the organisation’s profile and delivers members’ satisfaction.**
- **Internal communication is necessary to bind members together whilst external communication is essential to promote the**
contribution the club make to the community. Both are required to recruit and retain members and build club capacity.

- Knowing the organisation operating rules and principles is necessary if circumstances require the organisation to adapt or change those rules to remain effective in a changing environment whilst remaining true to its stated values.
- To embrace change members must: believe it is necessary, understand how they will be affected and what their expected contribution will be.
- Having a large amount of information available does not motivate members to learn about the organisation. Learning opportunities occur when relevant information is provided by members mentoring others who will directly benefit from it.
CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION
Introduction

When the research was initiated it was driven by the concern that an organisation providing benefits to both the local community and its members was slowly losing its capacity to remain effective. The organisation’s membership - made up of volunteers drawn from business and professional occupations - appeared well suited to participate in a collaborative project aiming to address the problem mentioned above.

The main organisational outcomes identified with the project included:
- developing the organisation’s capacity: identifying the problem and addressing it as a tactical and short term operational outcome
- enhancing individual members’ capacity: personal learning from the actions taken, as a more strategic and longer term outcome that would also benefit the organisation

To achieve those aims a methodology relying on collaboration between participants guided by action research, action learning, and process consulting principles was used to design the research approach. Grounded theory was also selected to provide local explanations for the research problem as this was to be an important outcome of the project39. Thus an evaluation of the research project needs to reflect on the aims of the chosen approach and examine if those were realised.

Validation

Given the research aimed to collaboratively address a problem and in the process improve the capacity of participants to manage future problems, validation of the research finding by participants was an essential requirement. Validation or trustworthiness was established through the use of triangulation or comparison between different data sources and analysts (Abraham 1997; McNiff & Whitehead 2006).

39 Refer to chapter 3 Methodology
**Triangulation of the data** was achieved by contrasting multiple data mining sources and instruments including:

- Groups sessions with members of the Board, the Reference Group, and club members involving brainstorming and reflective discussions.
- Individual participation through interviews, informal/formal discussions, observations and surveys.
- The researcher’s journal and notes.

The use of tables to bring together individual and group contributions also facilitated the process of capturing and cross referencing the data collected\(^{40}\). This allowed for the emergence and confirmation of common threads that could then be further scrutinized and tested by participants as part of the iterative data mining and validation process adopted for the project.

**Interpretation, confirmation, and ownership of the data**, involved the researcher, members of the reference group and the club’s membership. The parties contributed their reflection as individuals and a collective to the development and confirmation of meanings from the data mined and validated as described above. The high level of involvement and collaboration achieved by all participants in groups or as individuals resulted in the interpretation of the data to be owned and accepted as representative and credible. As themes emerged, explanations were provided by the different groups and refined when exposed to the scrutiny of others. The process allowed for further evidence to be added until participants could concur and agree that a representative interpretation had emerged. As the project gained momentum and participants became more experienced and comfortable with the approach being used, their capacity for critical introspection also increased. This resulted in outcomes that were recognised and accepted as challenging but doable and relevant.

Overall validity was tested using four of the five Herr and Anderson (2005) validity criteria\(^{41}\).

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\(^{40}\) An example is at Appendices E.

\(^{41}\) The five validity criteria (outcome, process, democratic, catalytic, and dialogic) test if the following action research goals (a) the generation of new knowledge, (b) the achievement of action-oriented
Outcome validity measured by the extent to which the identified organisational problem was addressed by the action component of the research.

The iterative process associated with action research gave participants the opportunity to learn and adjust their approach through two cycles of actions.

The first cycle involved the implementation of remedial actions developed in response to what had been identified to be the problem and how it could be addressed. This was the first attempt by participants at formally implementing actions aimed at developing their organisation by using a collaborative approach. They adopted a plan reflecting an image of reality constructed by people who were novices at a process dependent on observations and reflections to determine and guide the actions taken. Whilst the first cycle did not produce the intended outcome it provided opportunities for participants to learn how to practice the process that would deliver those outcomes.

The second cycle benefited from the experience and learning gained in the first cycle. Participants were able to reframe the problem and their role to reflect the emergence of a new reality which placed them at the centre of the actions required to develop the organisation. This resulted in the decision that maintaining the status quo was no longer an appropriate course of action for the organisation and its members. By leveraging on the experience of the first cycle participants were able to recast their construction of the problem. The outcome of the second cycle was the adoption of significant structural and process changes aimed at increasing the organisation’s capacity to develop itself in the short and long terms.

Process validity, measured by the extent problem identification and resolution provided opportunities to learn about the participants and the organisation.

The process - reliant on distinct groups such as the Board, the reference group and the membership sharing and reflecting their assumptions of the problem - introduced outcomes, (c) the education of both researcher and participants, (d) results that are relevant to the local setting, and (e) a sound and appropriate methodology, have been achieved.

(Herr and Handerson 2005: 55-57)
a new awareness of both the organisation and its members. Questions such as: *why members join the organisation and what are we aiming to achieve at the local level*, provided participants with opportunities to question theirs and fellow members’ motives. For example: the previous assumption that all members shared a common reason for joining the organisation was shown to be erroneous. The reality was more complex and reflected the level of perceived congruence individual members believed to exist between the organisation’s objectives and their own. The research also found that assumptions concerning what the organisation stood for differed between members who constructed a reality that was influenced by their perception and interests. For example: members whose main interest was to provide a service to their local community were not relating to Rotary’s commitments to the international community.

This proved to be a valuable experience for participants, since learning about the organisation and themselves was a first and necessary step on the journey to addressing the organisational problem.

*Democratic validity, measured by the level of collaboration achieved by participants in the action research/problem solving exercise.*

The adoption of an approach drawing from action research, process consulting and collaboration was assisted by the Rotary organisation and club’s stated values and beliefs in democratic principles. Throughout the project, participants individually and collectively contribute their ideas, observations and reflections to inform the process and assess their performance. Collaboration between participants was expected since the organisation strength is based on its members pooling their business and professional knowledge and experience to deliver benefits to the community. However, the process - of obtaining ideas and then asking contributors to openly discuss those with the aim to question their relevance or applicability - contributed to an increased level of awareness concerning the benefits to be gained by adopting a collaborative approach.

Specific to the project was to engage club members in solving a problem faced by their club. Previously they had collaborated to address community problems and the
new paradigm, calling members to address a problem faced by the club, introduced a different dimension to their collaboration. To address a community problem usually required a general agreement by the entire membership and a group of members to collaborate to deliver an outcome. By contrast the project, aimed at addressing a critical problem faced by the club, required all members to collaborate. This led to a higher level of involvement on the part of a large majority of the club’s membership. As one member indicated, *if we sink or swim will depend on what we all do or don’t do.*

*Catalytic validity, measured by the degree to which participants were able to draw from the research process to construct a more representative reality and how they were able to influence it.*

The action research approach calling for action to be followed by evaluation through a process of reflective discussions, provided participants with rich opportunities to reassess their original assumptions. The learning achieved challenged participants to construct a new reality in which their capacity to address the problem was increased whilst remaining congruent with their values and beliefs. The realisation that the key to building and retaining the organisation’s capacity was within their power to achieve was a prime example of the new reality. It took a full project cycle before participants were able to let go of the belief that the problem was caused by external factors outside their control. Once the new reality had emerged, participants were able to set the structure and processes that would assist in delivering the desired outcomes. The transformation was a product of the iterative process of sharing explanations, observing the dynamics involved, and reflecting on what it meant. Participants generally agreed that they needed both the process and the time to construct a more representative reality of the situation faced by the club and how they could change it.
For the researcher his assumption that objectivity was an appropriate and realistic approach to take when engaged in problem solving dramatically changed as a result of this project. This earlier assumption has been replaced by a well anchored belief in the influence of subjectivity to the construction of reality in both the mind of individuals and his own.

**Reflecting on organisational learning outcomes**

The general feedback from participants was that they and consequently the organisation had learned from their participation in the action research project. The consensus was that the project had influenced how the organisation would maintain and build its capacity by demonstrating the benefits of a collaborative approach to problem solving. A significant learning and consequential behavioural change for the organisation was to acknowledge that each member had to be both a leader and a follower. This also served to inform/remind participants that a criterion when selecting people for membership is their capacity, with training and experience, to one day lead their club and then alternate in the roles of leader and follower. Another learning outcome, resulting in a positive organisational change of practice, has been the recognition that effective planning and communication is everybody’s responsibility.

Participants, through the actions taken during the project were able to observe how the identified issues of leadership, planning and communication, once put together, contributed to building organisational capacity. This led to the pictorial metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle being used, to reinforce the importance of each of those elements to unlocking the organisation’s overall capacity, by participants.
Reflecting on individual learning outcomes

The researcher

The journey was a very personal adventure and an opportunity to discover how I would react when placed in an action research paradigm. One such learning was how I would behave in the role of researcher and my effectiveness at working with others in a collaborative manner. But even more important was to test my capacity to be critical of my performance and being able to examine my feelings and responses to the sometime messy process associated with the action research project. To achieve this it was necessary, at times, to let go of the action element of the
research process and move to a reflection phase. This was not always easy since action gives the impression of going forward whilst stopping to reflect felt more like I was standing still and wasting time. However, as I progressed on the path of my action research journey, I became increasingly conscious of the necessity to pause, observe and reflect on what was happening around me. Essential to the process was writing those observations down and spending some time reflecting on what was happening and why: what was happening to myself and why, as well as asking others to reflect on those questions. The process helped when having to face outcomes that greatly differed from both the group and my expectations. More importantly it gave rise to moments of truth when I suddenly realised, through the process of reflection, that I had it wrong and needed to start again. It was that emerging discovery about myself and others collaborating on the project that provided me with the learning by doing identified with the adopted action research approach.

Prior to commencing the action research project I had hesitated between selecting a familiar setting - the organisation I work with - and a less familiar environment - a community service organisation. The decision to go for the later was prompted by a belief that the choice was likely to provide me with greater opportunities to learn about myself. In this instance learning was associated with action and would also provide me with a real test as to my capacity to enhance my practice in the area of organisational development. When reflecting on the decision I can now say that my assessment was correct. Whilst I have learned about myself in the context of practicing action research, I believe I have also developed the skills to continue doing so in the future. I have learned to reflect on my actions more objectively by empowering the little internal voice that asked those difficult questions about the true value of what I was doing and why.

Cognition

In a paradoxical way my previous feeling that the more I learn the more I realise how little I know was reinforced by the learning I gained as a result of this action research project. Prior to commencing the research journey, I was both elated and apprehensive at the prospect of becoming an action researcher. The elation came from knowing that by practicing and implementing an action research-based
methodology I would have a real opportunity to learn what it had to offer. By
contrast the apprehension came from jumping into the unknown under the guise of a
researcher, a title likely to be associated with a proficiency I knew I did not possess.

As a novice action researcher I took some comfort in being able to explain to the
organisation and its members that far from being an expert who had the answers to
their problem, I would be a companion on a journey where the objective was to
collectively address that problem. However, it was also difficult for me to promote
the adoption of a project based on a methodology that would require participants to
go forward, backwards and sideways in order to build the organisation’s capacity to
be offering a journey where the only certainty was that there was no certainty and a
lot of soul searching ahead. This did not make the task of selling the methodology to
participants very easy.

Sense of belonging

As a person for whom English is a second language, I have often been uncomfortable
in situations that require me to communicate on issues that are outside my area of
knowledge and experience. This is based on the concern that if the audience does
not relate to or want to hear my message the easy way out is to dismiss it on the basis
of my ethnicity, as opposed to reflect more deeply on the issue. In my place of
employment this had been mitigated by the position I hold and the recognition of the
industry knowledge and experience I possess. However, outside this comfort zone I
am aware that others consciously or unconsciously can and have found it expedient
to use the accent or the different cultural background to switch off and dismiss my
message.

Being an insider with a long association with the organisation helped in the area of
trust and credibility. My fellow club members regard me as a traditionalist with a
strong knowledge of the organisation’s history and governing principles. However, I
was a little apprehensive at the prospect of moving from that role and become a
challenger of the established norms and practices.
Team Management Index

My major role is that of a thruster-producer with a leaning towards being extrovert, practical, analytical and structured in my approaches to work. At the beginning of the project I relied on the structured parts such as the practicality of devising a plan and implementing it, collecting data and analysing it, to assist me with what Cherry (1999, 21) calls the “trickery” of action research. The experience gained from practicing an action research methodology as enhanced my capacity for creativity/innovation and exploration in collaboration with others. This will be a decided advantage professionally as a manager in an industry that is rapidly shedding its mechanistic approach for a more organic style of management.

Prior to the project, my approach was to build and rely on bastions of certainty to deal with the surprises that managing an organisation would unavoidably throw at me. When I reflect on this behaviour it was understandable since I had been influenced by both my profession and the power generation industry in which I have worked for most of my career. I had been captured by a work environment and culture where machines are dictating the actions of the people and the organisation reliant on them for their business. The paradigm I operated in was mechanistic and problems addressed by reducing and isolating the complex into simple parts that could be better controlled.

The personal action learning achieved from my participation in the project taught me to draw from the complexity inherent with the operation of an organisation. I have also realised that there is nothing wrong with uncertainty provided it is used as an opportunity to search for explanations and responses that will lead to improvements. Above all, the project demonstrated to me that responses to complex organisational problems in an uncertain environment will be more effective if they emerge from the collaborative efforts of the people affected by that problem.

42 Reference is made to the Margerison-McCann Team Management Systems and the researcher Team management Profile.
43 The researcher is a manager in a government owned public utility corporation.
44 See chapter 4 and The evolution of organisational paradigms
The collaborative approach to problem solving reliant on participants examining and reflecting on their assumptions to let new ideas emerge has also taught me to value patience when seeking to genuinely engage with and empower participants. This has provided me with an alternative to the mechanistic problem solving approach - reliant on adopting or adapting established solutions to quickly resolve emerging organisational problems - I am familiar with. The project, using a collaborative approach to problem solving required that a significant amount of time be invested up front; however, it resulted in a more effective implementation of the agreed change by the organisation.

**Club members**

The action research was collaborative and intended to provide the organization and its members with the opportunity to learn from the process so as to maintain its capacity in the future.

The feedback received from participants and the observations made by the researcher indicated that participants were able to achieve a range of learning outcomes. The change in behaviour over the duration of the project and the data collected from questionnaires, surveys and workshops was used as evidence of that learning by individuals and the group.

The challenge associated with having to personally contribute to the change required to resolve a significant organisational issue catapulted many participants outside the comfort zone they had defined for themselves as club members. Moving from being a spectator to becoming an actor was evidence of a behavioural change by many club members as a result of their involvement in the project.

Having to address an organisational problem was also a learning opportunity for participants not used to doing so as members of a community service organisation.

A reflection made in chapter one was to posit why members of a community service organisation who were business leaders and professionals *would not apply their*
What emerged from the discussion was that the majority of club members had joined the organisation to: give something back to the community, increase their network and have fun/relax in the company of like minded people. Governance of the club was not an area of great interest to most club members and consequently the norm was to leave that responsibility to the few who were prepared to become involved in that role. As a result of the project there is now a greater awareness and acceptance that all members must share responsibility for running the organisation and take a more active role in its development.

At the beginning of the intervention members identified issues that were outside their sphere of influence such as societal changes, poor public image of the organisation, and lack of leadership as the problem. This may have reflected the fact that previous problems being addressed by the organisation were external and related to the community, as opposed to themselves. The iterations associated with action research coupled with the dialectic process engaged in during meetings and workshops slowly led participants to the conclusion that they were picking symptoms as opposed to problems. In the process came the realisation that by being honest and identifying themselves with the problem participants also discovered that they could do something about it.

Another outcome was addressing a significant organisational problem through an approach and process requiring participants to collaborate. Having to explain and justify what caused the problem as individuals and a group provided members with opportunities to learn about themselves and their fellow participants. Establishing that members had joined the organisation for different reasons was a prime example of an emerging reality acknowledging there was a diversity of motives and objectives amongst club members.

Observation by the researcher and feedback from participants showed the following behavioural changes:

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45 See Chapter 1 – Purpose of the project
an acceptance that not knowing how to address the problem, how the organisation operated and unfamiliarity with the collaborative problem solving approach taken was the norm for most participants. However, the lack of knowledge became recognised as a temporary state able to be rectified by asking questions and providing information. As the project unfolded an increase in the preparedness by club members to ask for more information, as opposed to withdraw from the process, could be observed. Participants were prepared to move out of their comfort zone in order to contribute to the project and its process.

an ability to go past the artefacts and identify the causes as opposed to the symptoms of the issues being discussed. Over time participants accepted and became proficient at questioning their individual and the group’s assumptions and interpretations of the phenomena being addressed. This indicated a growing capacity to challenge the status quo and was made possible by the high level of trust the adopted process had developed amongst participants.

developing an awareness of the power of images, metaphors and stories to convey a message and enhance communication. As the project unfolded participants drew from existing organisational metaphors to convey the values and belief of the organisation. Local metaphors were also developed to illustrate the process being planned to attract new members to the club. Story telling and imaging pushed those values and beliefs into the open for all members to identify with.

constructing a shared reality to replace the propensity for the blame game state that had prevailed before the project. Participants developed an awareness of the influence their behaviour had on other individuals and groups and the consequences it had on the organisation. Accepting personal responsibility for implementing the decision made by the collective to introduce change led to a renewed level of motivation amongst participants. As a drop of oil spread on a water surface so did the level of engagement in the change process. The organisation’s paradigm moved from the Board being expected to command and control (mechanistic) to a more dynamic and fluid climate (organic) in which members now collaborate to achieve common goals.

46 See footnote 29 in the implementation chapter above
47 See the fishing metaphor in the implementation chapter above
learning about themselves and the organisation as a result of the actions taken was recognised as valuable to participants and potentially to others as well. The process adopted for the project was seen as something worth sharing with other clubs.\(^48\) This was recognised as significant and an indication of a newly found pride in the organisation now regarded as having something to contribute as a result of the experience gained from the collaborative process adopted to address its problem.

**Critical evaluation of the implementation**

The research process provided a challenging but rewarding vehicle to both the researcher and other participants in the research.

As a long serving member of the club, the researcher identified with the role of an insider looking in the organisation. He assumed his knowledge of the people, the organisation, and its operation would facilitate the research process. This was often correct; however, as the research journey unfolded there were occasions to question the reasons for this initial assumption. This occurred when the researcher realised that he did not know his fellow club member’s as well as he had thought. For example: he was not fully aware of the different and diverse motives individual members had for joining the organisation or what they expected in return from their involvement in a community service club. This proved to be important when seeking to explain the different levels of commitment to engage in the cooperative problem-solving processes. When having to face this new reality the researcher felt more like an outsider looking in and attempting to collaborate with insiders who he did not always fully understand. This duality of role and perspective from insider to outsider contributed to the development of different assessments of the behaviours being observed.

\(^48\) See eight interview, member ID14 at Appendix S – Relevant extract below:

*I guess I would think Jean-Luc when you’ve put this together it would be really good if we could have the District Governor and some other people part of the feedback so that they could understand some of the issues because I think this has been a great process and I think it would apply across a lot of Clubs.*
The result was the construction of explanations based on the emergence of a reality that at times diverged significantly from the assumptions made when the project was initiated. Other participants were also affected by this discovery and able to use that emerging *new reality* to question their assumptions and consequentially some of the organisation’s current practices and assumptions.

For example they were able to question:

- the quality of the information and the level of support provided to prospective and new members
- the actual level of knowledge and understanding of the organisation amongst members including long serving members
- the paucity of accurate data such as why prospective members decide not to join and why former members left the club

As the journey unfolded the researcher’s earlier propensity to seek objectivity was replaced by a newly-developed interest towards subjectivity and the influence of an individual’s assumptions on how reality is perceived⁴⁹. This led the analysis of the data in a direction intended to produce findings that would reflect a local reality constructed by participants in the project.

For club members the concept of being full participants in the research was readily and positively accepted. Overtly, all members declared their commitment to participate even if this did not necessarily translate in an actual or equal level of contribution from each individual throughout the process. Member participation was good overall, but also differed depending on the research instrument used. For example:

*Workshops and meetings* attracted the fullest participation with the data contributed by participants reflecting the open and consultative process used. Those activities

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⁴⁹ *Extract from the researcher’s journal*

- My first assessment was that some members do not appear to be eager to become too involved.
- On reflection and after further observations and discussions those members are in fact unsure of what they can come up with. One member told me “I am happy to do what is required but I do not have a solution for the problem.”
gave participants the opportunity to openly comment, question and validate the data provided through questionnaires and interviews.

**The responses to questionnaires** allowed the researcher to code the data and commence analysing these codes with the research reference group and at workshops. Of all the instruments used questionnaires appeared to engage fewer members than structured events such as workshops or interviews. When asked why they had not responded to questionnaires, members indicated a lack of time and/or forgetting to do it as the reasons. On the few occasions when members were asked to answers questions during a workshop and provided written group responses, participation was extremely good. It appeared that members were prepared to commit to the research during structured events - workshops, interviews, and reference group meetings - but were less motivated when expected to contribute their time outside those.

**Individual interviews** were very successful at providing rich personal data from participants and verifying, by a process of comparison, some of the explanations emerging from questionnaires and workshops. All participants agreed to have their interview tape-recorded - a process that allowed the researcher to better interact with the interviewee. This resulted in a fluid and effective exchange being achieved due to the communication process not being impeded by the researcher having to take notes. The feedback provided by interviewees also indicated that they were more comfortable with having the full attention of the researcher.

Of interest to the researcher has been the attitude of members to the implementation of an action research methodology. Whilst many members were comfortable with the process, others appeared uneasy with the requirement that they become actors in the development and application of responses to the identified problem. It was suspected this reluctance to become substantially involved in the research process influenced the number of questionnaires returned to the researcher. Another observation, as indicated above, was the original tendency for club members as a group to construct a reality in which external factors were the root causes of the problem faced by the organisation. This resulted in having to go through a full
research cycle before a new reality, in which the problem was linked to internal factors, begun to emerge amongst participants.

For the researcher, the process has met his expectations, and whilst the research journey was not always easy, it was far from lonely as a result of the collaborative approach taken.

A challenge of the adopted process was to obtain sufficient representative contributions from all the participants and maintain the required level of consultation necessary to analyse and reflect on the data. The amount of time required to collect and assess the large amount of data associated with the methodology was an impost on an organisation made up of business and professional volunteers. Because participants had to balance the requirement of their work and commitments to the service club, a situation identified as an issue with building and retaining members, making time for the action research was often difficult. The researcher posits if using an action research methodology with employees in paid work, as opposed to volunteers, would make time spent on the research more acceptable to those involved. However, employees in paid work may not display the same level of altruism toward their work colleagues as did the volunteers participating in the project. In a project requiring participants to closely collaborate in a climate of trust and mutual respect working with volunteers greatly assisted the process of gathering and assessing sufficient representative data.

Change implementation

Once the need to change had been accepted, the organisation benefited from being able to adopt a new governance model developed by its parent organisation Rotary International. The implementation of a new structure and new processes was also facilitated by the twelve months of collaboration that identified and validated the decision to adopt that new governance model.

The new structure is reliant on members to exercise leadership formally and informally. For example: a member motivated to run a particular project is able,
once it has received Board approval, to coopt other members and run that project. As a result planning and communication concerning such a project has also shifted to those individuals empowered to implement it. With the increased delegation from the Board to the membership, there is a greater sense of ownership of the club’s current and future development. This is contributing to capacity building for the club and its members.

With the increased ownership and awareness of what the club is contributing to the community, members have also become better able to promote the organisation externally. The perception that the club should do more has receded and been replaced by the realisation that what the club does is done well and is limited by its capacity. The greater participation in planning club’s activities has made members aware that to do more the club requires more resources and that they also share responsibility for increasing the membership level.

Unfortunately the recruitment of new members has not yet been achieved to match the club’s objectives. However, with the changed structure and shared responsibilities for leadership, planning and communication the club is more effective with the deployment of its members. There is a new interest in the overall operation and objectives of the club, a greater understanding and respect for the formal leadership and work of the Board, and motivation to continue with the initiatives resulting from the project.

The most encouraging development for the researcher has been an overall commitment by club members\textsuperscript{50} to continue with practices adopted as part of the project and more specifically:

\begin{quotation}
\textit{Extract from the Club’s Annual/President Report}
\end{quotation}

\textit{During the vacancy of the Club Service position I undertook to meet with a number of interested members to discuss membership development. This coincided with the work of Jean-Luc and his studies. Putting a distinction between Jean-Luc’s work and the work of membership development as an operational matter was difficult as he is an active member of our club and his knowledge of Rotary provided a wealth of contribution to this issue. Further the commitment of members to his studies was important and it was a contribution that occurred in line with the membership development process itself. Given the limited resources (time, commitments) of members I am appreciative of the hard work that many members that many members contributed to both those initiatives.}

\textit{(John Rawnsley 2008)}
• Collaboration between Board and club members over the range of activities (internal and external) performed by the organisation.
• A commitment to the new organisational governance structure and processes expressed through a behaviour acknowledging the contribution that each member make as a result of:
  o her/his knowledge and experience as business leaders and professionals
  o the practice of sharing information, observation and reflection as an effective approach to ongoing organisational development
• Staying alert and avoiding a return to the old ways and the previous complacency that led to the downward spiral, frustrations, and loss of motivation.

**Applicability to other Rotary clubs**

The Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua was the first Rotary club in the area to change its governance model as a result of the project. Since the change, another two Rotary clubs in the area facing a similar capacity problem have decided to also change and adopt the new governance structure.

**Conclusion**

Positive outcomes were achieved as a result of the project and the approach and processes adopted. Most notable were:
• Participants genuinely collaborating to critically examine and question their interpretation of the reasons for the organisation loss of capacity and going from the superficial to the deeper causes of the problem.
• Participants trusting the researcher to take them on an unfamiliar path intended to produce desirable but uncertain outcomes. The preparedness to being reflective about personal and organisational issues with the researcher and other
participants was evidence of participants’ trust in the approach, the researcher and themselves.

- Participants being prepared to learn and change. The adoption of a new governance model, in which they are required to take a more active role in the operation of the organisation and responsibility for its development, is a prime example of the learning achieved.

At the time of writing this thesis the outcomes of the project, organisational learning and the adoption of a new governance model, are still relatively fresh and yet to go through the test of time. However, the signs are that club members are sufficiently motivated to build on what the project was able to achieve.

This belief is due to in part to the learning achieved but more importantly to the change in behaviour resulting from the action phase of the project. The reflective process and soul searching often resulted in constructive criticism and frank feedback and could only occur in a climate of mutual trust and openness between participants.

The duration of the project and its perceived lack of demonstrable outcomes during the first half (cycle) was initially perceived as a negative. As the project second half (cycle) came to a close participants acknowledged the benefits of the open iterative reflective process that gave them time to let new ideas emerge and put them to the test. The consensus was that it allowed participants to do the right thing for the organisation as opposed to being content with doing things right. An outcome congruent with the beliefs and values of the community service organisation that Rotary is 51.

The project and decision to change has also validated the benefits of the new governance model to others with another two Rotary clubs in the area deciding to implement a similar change.

51 Rotary beliefs and values are exemplified by the motto: SERVICE ABOVE SELF
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION
The purpose of this project was to assist the Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua, a community service organisation, build and maintain its capacity. To build capacity meant the organisation had to act, whilst to maintain capacity it would also need to learn how to more effectively manage its future.

More recently the club had not been able to recruit and make-up for the loss of members as it had been able to in the past. This reduced human resource capacity was having an impact on the club’s operational effectiveness and raised concerns about its ability to continue performing its role in the local community. An ageing membership, a dependence on a few to manage the club’s operation was also compounding the problem and affecting motivation.

The project intended to be a collaborative action research endeavour between the researcher and club members. It was based on a nominalist approach in which human consciousness creates its own reality. Knowledge was to be constructed by participants and reflect the information available to them. The intention was to depart from the prevalent research orthodoxy promoting positivism and the belief that truth and reality exist independently of what participants think and that knowledge is acquired through an objective use of the senses. The project was an opportunity to develop the organisation by shifting the mindset of participants from a mechanistic to a more organic paradigm.

The project methodology was developed using a nominalist/interpretive approach reliant on qualitative/action research and process consulting to engage participants in problem solving cycles involving collaboration, implementation, observation and reflection. Participants included the organisation’s Board and club members and a reference group made up of Board and club members working in collaboration with the researcher. The identification of issues and remedial actions involved two cycles of data collection, observation, reflective discussions and review. The first cycle was exploratory and allowed participants to familiarise themselves with the approach and processes used. The second cycle drew from the experience of the first cycle and allowed participants to probe deeper into the organisation and the issues that had emerged out of that process. The iterative process involving scrutiny and reflective discussion achieved saturation and the realisation that change was required. This
was realised with the decision to implement a new governance model for the organisation.

An objective of the project was to develop an understanding of the organisation and its members in the context of the problem it faced. This was achieved through the adoption of a collaborative process in which participants analysed, interpreted and validated the data captured during the project to construct explanations for the phenomenon being observed. This led to the emergence of local theory grounded in data identifying that collective and individual responsibility in the exercise of formal/informal leadership, planning, internal/external communication and mentoring was necessary to building and maintaining the organisation’s capacity.

The local theory also identified that organisational development through successful change is dependent on participants understanding both the impact change will have on them and the level of contribution to the process expected of them. This equipped the organisation and its members with the capacity to agree to and implement a new governance model.

The local theory mentioned above was developed from data and by participants from a specific community service organisation made up of volunteers. Since completion of the project another two Rotary clubs in the area have also decided to implement similar change to resolve their capacity problem. However, the theory is also believed to be applicable to any organisations intent on building and maintaining their capacity and interested to migrate from the traditional mechanistic paradigm toward a more organic approach to organisational development and change. The application of the methodology adopted for this project in an organisation which objective is to return a profit and with participants in paid employment would effectively test the generalizability of the theory described above.

The project also promoted behavioural change by encouraging participants to shift from a passive to an active role and accept shared responsibility for the organisation’s development. The actions that led to the decision to change also equipped participants with the knowledge, experience and confidence necessary to ensure that developing the organisation would remain a continuous endeavour.
The researcher learned from the project and its novel approach to organisational development and change. The project provided many opportunities to observe and reflect on the journey’s impacts such as behavioural change and deep personal learning. The experience was both confronting and elating as the original apprehensions of the unknown was replaced by the satisfaction of being able to achieve a positive outcome for and with other participants.

As a result of the project, the organisation and its members have adopted a new governance model that is more inclusive and provides for a greater level of participation in the organisation’s operation. Members have also acknowledged being part of a complex new reality in which they are expected to contribute and combine their knowledge and experience to build and maintain the organisation’s capacity. The new climate has contributed to a burgeoning motivation as each member accepts a share of responsibility for the club’s operation and the earlier downward spiral affecting the organisation has been halted.

The project aims was to build and maintain the organisation’s capacity. There are concrete signs that capacity has been built as evidenced by the new climate of cooperation and positive attitude prevailing amongst club members. The ability to maintain capacity will be tested over time and influenced by participants maintaining their commitment to developing the organisation and the new members who were not involved in the project. The project is topical at this point in time, but the question is: will this last and become part of the organisation’s folklore with future members telling the story of how they got together, changed the way things were done and gave the organisation a new lease of life?


A. Letter of approval from the club President

Dr Murray Redman  
Senior Lecturer International Management  
Course Coordinator Grad Dip PSEM, MEPSM, MLCM, SEMBA, DBA  
Charles Darwin University  
Casuarina Campus  
Darwin NT

Dear Dr Redman

Further to our discussion with Jean-Luc Revel related to the Rotary club of Alice Springs Mbantua becoming involved in an Action Research project forming part of his thesis and the Charles Darwin University DBA program.

At our Board meeting it was agree that he has our permission to carry out an action research intervention with and within the club as well as recording his observations of the club deliberations and operation.

We support his endeavour and use of the data that will be collected as part of his research. We have no objection to Jean-Luc approaching Board and club members to seek their input and contribution toward the research being carried out.

We believe that his work will provide an opportunity for the club to examine some of the issues it faces with attracting and retaining a level of membership sufficient to perform effectively as a community service organisation.

Yours sincerely

John Rawnsley

John Rawnsley  
President 2007/08
B. Pro-Format used when conducting interviews

Discuss the interview format:
- the researcher aims to encourage the interviewee to share his/her observations of the intervention so far
- the interviewee will not be identified with the information he/she provides
- the information will be used as part of the body of data/information being collected and will be shared with other participants to prompt reflections and contribute to ensuring that as many relevant issues as possible have been captured

Ask permission to tape the interview and explain that there will be a transcript made of the interview with a copy available to the interviewee. Transcript will be identified with a numerical code to allow the researcher to:
- go back to the interviewee and clarify aspects of the interview at a later date
- as the project progresses discuss with the interviewee changes that may have occurred

Ask the interviewee to comment on:
- the current problem faced by the club
- the issues identified by participants concerned by ineffective:
  - leadership
  - planning
  - communication
  - motivation
- Any other matters the interviewee feels are relevant to the club’s current predicament and the project
- Any questions concerning the project, its process, objectives

Thanks the interviewee
C. 1st cycle first questionnaire

13 August 2007 – The first questionnaire was handed out at the second workshop held with club members. Questions asked and aggregated responses were:

1. A. What do I think is the most relevant issue (s)?
   – Respondents indicated the lack of planning, poor promotion and the frequency and format of the club weekly meetings to be the most relevant issues impeding the recruitment of new members.
   – Overall, not having a recruitment strategy was identified as the most important issue.
   – Better promotion of what the club does in the community was ranked as the next most important issue.
   – The time and format and content of the weekly meeting, is also perceived as discouraging some people from joining the club.

1. B. Why do I think this is the most relevant issue (s)?
   – Respondents indicated that the club is competing with many other demands on people’s time.
   – Without a plan, the club is unlikely to achieve its objective to recruit new members.
   – Without promoting what it does the club is unlikely to be regarded as providing value to the community and its members.
   – It is easier to promote something that offers value and is fun to be in. Most people Rotary is trying to attract are time poor and weekly attendance can be a deterrent to some people joining.

2. A. What action (s) do I think will address the identified issue (s)?
   – Respondents indicated the process associated with developing a recruitment plan such as doing a strength, weakness, opportunities and threats analysis will give the club a better chance to achieve its objective.
   – Promoting the club will require members to identify the community work being done and develop marketing strategies.
   – Reviewing the weekly meeting format, and identifying activities that will provide better value to participants.

2. B. Why do I think the action (s) will address the identified issues (s)?
   – A membership plan will identify who does what and when. It will provide club members with a process and ideas on how to recruit new members. For example identifying new people when they arrive in town and approaching them to join the club.
   – Promoting the contributions the club makes to the community will allow people to appreciate the benefits of membership. Those who benefits, includes the community as well as club members feeling good about being involved in service work.

3. A. What, do I think, will be a good indicator of the actions implemented being a success?
   – An increase in membership numbers and community interest in the activity of the club was the majority response received. Also listed as a measure of
success was the capacity of the club to become involved in more community activities and increasing its ability to be an effective service organisation.

3. B. Why do I think this will be a good indicator of success?
   – Most respondents believe getting new members and increasing the membership numbers is critical to the club remaining effective. Since the club is a community service organisation its capacity to manage itself and respond to community needs was identified as the best indicator of success.
### D. 1st cycle second questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IA – What do I think is the most relevant issue (s)?</th>
<th>1–B Why do I think this is the most relevant issue (s)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Need a methodology/strategic plan</td>
<td>1. Because pool of potential members is small, having a strategy to engaging those people is the key to success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Poor promotion. Image is of an old men/businessmen club.</td>
<td>2. Majority of people are unaware of what Rotary does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Public perceive Rotary as old and conservative. Image needs refreshing/updating.</td>
<td>3. Need to break down the negative perception of Rotary to attract new members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Poor promotion. Need strategic plan that will be implemented. Average of club membership may discourage younger people to join.</td>
<td>4. There are a lot of professional people in Alice Springs who do not participate in a service club. Society has become more self serving and egoistic. Others would need talking into it. But I am not the missionary type, neither are most of us. Maybe we are afraid of rejection?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The meeting can be boring especially if no one (new speaker) is presenting a topic.</td>
<td>5. Boring equates with no fun – why would you want to invite others to a boring club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Poor promotion locally may be a problem. We do need a methodology/strategic plan; need to raise local profile so that public (potential members) know more about Rotary; we all need to make an effort to ask people along.</td>
<td>6. I just think people either don’t have enough information or don’t have the CORRECT information. Getting that across, especially the fact that we have FUN is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Rotary not being perceived as attracting semi professional people. Lack of focussed promotion of Rotary locally to attract new members.</td>
<td>7. I think to a degree that Rotary is still seen as an ‘old boys club’ probably because we don’t promote the benefits of joining Rotary to any great degree to show that Rotary is for all ages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Weekly meetings for one hour may be too much for certain professional. I know that was a concern of mine.</td>
<td>8. Everyone is busy with jobs and personal lives, certainly the professional cadre that we are trying to attract is. When you couple the weekly meeting commitment with other functions like HOT, sausage sizzles, monthly board meetings, the time commitment gets to be too much, in my opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Limited number of ‘professional’ people to support range of organisations including those that are not “Service Clubs”. Need to find a way to shift the paradigm so that the “old staid” image of Rotary can be better perceived as current and relevant to today’s society.</td>
<td>9. People are “too busy at this time” with work and family commitments. Better marketing of Rotary and what we do at the local community level as well as the international activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 A – What action(s) do I think will address the identified issue(s)?</td>
<td>2 B – Why do I think the action(s) will address the identified issues(s)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Produce a membership strategy. Key plank is for select members to directly approach certain vocations, in addition to relying on current member’s networks.</td>
<td>1. Identifying vocations and professional people in addition to current member’s network is the most logical way of engaging potential members who would be interested in membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Combined club feature, possibly leaflet to be delivered to homes outlining benefits of being in Rotary and the work Rotary is involved in.</td>
<td>2. Improve the awareness of Rotary in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Update Rotary “model” across the board from the top down so that it relates to today’s life style and pressures</td>
<td>3. A new look Rotary would be seen as more accessible and be “recognisable” to younger people who are the future of Rotary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Find a person with a missionary zeal or advertise relentlessly.</td>
<td>4. Once people understand that belonging to Rotary has benefits, not monetary but character building, getting to know people in other walks of life, leadership training and the joy of giving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Change the meeting format!</td>
<td>5. Need regular presenters. Need to pre-advertise presenters to club members as well as to the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Developing a plan and sticking to it.</td>
<td>6. Because we aren’t doing anything with any structure now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Creation of a membership drive Coordinator within our I with a sub-committee of say four other enthusiastic members. The mix in the sub-committee needs to be of the more senior/long serving members but also some of the newer/younger members. The Coordinator ideally would be a younger member who is enthusiastic and can show that age is no impediment to joining Rotary.</td>
<td>7. The sub-committee can focus on membership, can raise the profile of Rotary in the community and could possibly, with appropriate advertising/promotion, run an information night in a bid to attract new members. The Coordinator could also challenge individual members within our I to bring along a guest with a view to future membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. As I have stated previously, I think we should reduce the frequency of our meetings. Twice per month would be an improvement.</td>
<td>8. The time commitment is much less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Probably needs District intervention to “bankroll” better publicity and marketing strategies. Develop relevant strategies to engage with younger potential members.</td>
<td>9. By creating better awareness of the value of Rotary to the local community as well as the personal gain for those who are interested in becoming involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 A – What do I think will be a good indicator of the actions implemented being a success?</td>
<td>3 B – Why do I think this will be a good indicator of success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Increase membership</td>
<td>1. Because increasing membership is the critical issue and the current primary focus for the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Increased interest in the community, increased media coverage and increased membership.</td>
<td>2. Not answered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rotary gaining a better public profile. Increased interest in Rotary.</td>
<td>3. It would indicate that Rotary was back on the community agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Membership is increasing</td>
<td>4. Because we achieved what we set out to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. More people being invited.</td>
<td>5. Because the club members themselves feel better about their own meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. An increase in membership (net increase)</td>
<td>6. Increase in membership is what we are aiming for – how else can you measure it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Achievable stretch targets for new members can be set. The sub-committee can focus on membership which may or may not create more of a chance of achieving membership targets.</td>
<td>7. Mbantua I needs an influx/injection of new members to compliment the existing membership. Hopefully new and enthusiastic members will stimulate more activity and generate more members who are prepared to become actively involved in our I and the work we do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>8. Other measurements may not get the specific information we’re looking for, ie. Why they are not joining. For example, there may be too many variables or indicators changing with other measurements, therefore making the results difficult to attribute to one specific variable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2</td>
<td>9. As per 3 A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Interviewing new members about what made them join and what caused them to delay joining. Additionally, we should ask those people that we approach about membership that do not join why they are not joining.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Greater level of interest by community members with more folks attending as “invited guests”. Potential to get more members in the long term.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
E. 1st cycle third questionnaire
22 October 2007 - Third questionnaire given to club members with aggregated responses listed below.

Question 1 – Do you believe the plan is working?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Too early to tell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why do you believe this is the appropriate answer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Too early to tell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Plan is OK. Results not yet materialised by show of new members.</td>
<td>No new members</td>
<td>How many letters sent? Two returns not accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With the President away, I believe the momentum has slowed down but I expect it to increase when he returns and we can see the results of the first set of letters that were sent out.</td>
<td>We are not seeing new / prospective members at our meeting as yet.</td>
<td>We need to target younger entrepreneurial business peoples. We need to market the club better to the broader community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not seeing any concrete signs of the plan working</td>
<td>Too early in the assessment of the idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 2 – If the answer is No what needs to change / what new actions are required for the plan to work?

- We need to make personal approaches to people as individuals
- Have projects that we can “sell” to prospective members as a reason for serving.
- Emphasis on community nature of projects
- It is probably too early in the process to gauge its success.
- We need to market the club better to the broader community.

Question 3 – Do you feel involved in the process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Partly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Partly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Certainly – It is a responsibility of all members to look for new potential members – for the well being of the club.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>President John is making a huge effort to involve us all but we need to make the effort ourselves:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To support John</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To get a result</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes – By being a member of our club.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes – I have contacted prospective members.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No

– I missed the meeting when the plan was communicated
– Those of us who have been Rotarians for a while have generally exhausted options in own respective circles.

Partly

– Partly involved by our contributions to the plan. Could be more involved preferably at meeting times.
– Most weeks I see only Rotarians & fellow workers. My fellow workers start at 07:30 and find a breakfast meeting “too hard”. I am promoting the great bunch of people, great way to start the week.

Question 4 – Any suggestion(s) to improve the process?

– It just needs to continue to be highlighted and promoted.
– Keep going as is for the moment – Review as to results.
– Keep trying – Don’t give up – it is a very personal approach that will bring in members.
– Use of E-mail to send information.
– Is a membership group operating or is John doing all the follow up?
– Regular reports on progress e.g. number of prospects, replies etc.
– Having chosen the current process lets follow though and see how well we can make it work.
F. First interview, member ID 15

The momentum has been lost due to the President being away. However, it is essential to continue with the membership drive. The two main reasons for not achieving are the club being too dependant on the President and club Service not being functional. Normally club Service would be driving the club membership strategy. Another reason is the lack of feedback following the decision to use the four Avenues of Service to drive the membership recruitment plan. The Directors of those four groups have not reported on what they are doing. I believe those leaders are not motivated and feeling responsible for membership growth. My observation is that leaders of those groups do not consider membership and recruitment an activity for which their group is responsible. When they meet the groups concentrate on what they believe is their core function, for example developing a budget to achieve their respective community projects. Membership is never on the agenda.

Another observation is, whilst the club agrees membership growth is a critical issue, that issue is not part of the regular discussion. There is a tendency for relaxation and socialising rather than working on the membership issue at the weekly meeting. To some degree this is linked to the lack of commitment by members to take on leadership roles on the Board. This brings up the issue of why people join Rotary, i.e. community service, socialising. Leading the operation of the club is not something many people appear to be interested in.

There is a problem with the President being regarded as solely responsible for leading the recruitment strategy and membership not being a regular item on the agenda. There is a malaise within the club and it is related to:

- People suggest things but do not follow through
- People who are time poor or believe they are time poor because of other commitments
- People not being committing to the plan and helping with the plan

After the weekly meeting people go back to their world and Rotary may not resurface for a week.

There is an issue of committees (Avenues of Service) not meeting regularly. We have many weekly meetings but very little else i.e., committee meeting. In previous years we have had presidents who made sure their committee met regularly.

There is a leadership vacuum in the club at the moment. Members are expecting leaders in the avenue of service to not only be the leaders but also be the builders. Those members are willing to turn up to be the hands on members but they do not want to spend a lot of time doing the preparation. This illustrates the problem and reinforces the importance of getting new members who will want to lead the club in the future. If this does not happen it is the same members that are expected to do the leading, become overloaded and loose their motivation.

I have seen a lack of confidence in our club members who, by contrast with other Rotary clubs I visit, do not have a high opinion of the club. To explain this, one of the major differences with our club is the greater amount of feedback concerning ongoing activities and projects those clubs provide their members at their regular meeting.

The club must have a strategy to grow its membership. That strategy must include mentoring new members as well as keeping all members involved and informed as to the operation of the club. I also believe the club must find out why some members leave. In my business if one of my employees leaves I want to know why. Maybe I
cannot do anything about that employee leaving but I may be able to prevent another one from leaving.

G. Second interview, member ID 19
I believe the membership issue has been going on for the last five years. I was very pleased that we are now formalising the issue through this action research project. Our current President is doing a good job to reinforce the importance of growing our membership. However, the entire club needs to actively contribute if the plan is to succeed.

When I think about what is happening I note the club has a number of members who have exercised leadership positions including President. Perhaps this is why there is some apathy as those previously active members believe they have done their share and it is now up to somebody else. I feel a bit that way myself as well as being reluctant to get too involved because of my current work and personal commitments.

I also note the club is not being business like about the issue of membership and other operational matters. Too often I have observed Directors not providing a report at weekly meetings and sometimes several weeks in a row. I believe there is a lot of information that can be provided to members by Directors. If there is no new events on a particular week Directors can talk about their Avenue of Service, provide information that will increase members’ knowledge of that Avenue of Service. I think the average understanding of how some things work with Rotary is very thin for many members.

Leadership is an issue that I did find difficult when I was President. It is a constant source of frustration to try to bring everybody together. Some Directors are not motivated whilst others do not want to be there. By the time you get to the end of your twelve months term you begin to put things in place but it is time to hand over to somebody else.

I ask why some members, when they return to being ordinary members, abdicate all responsibilities for leadership to others. Those members have a responsibility to pass their knowledge and skills to other members. However, they seem to be happy to sit back and think it up to somebody else to be involved. The lack of mentoring is affecting the club. Some members are not prepared to take on positions perceived as difficult and this is probably due to not understanding what is involved. Obviously members will have different leadership aspirations and styles. However, unless the club has a plan to train new members and have an orderly succession for its Board members it is going to lose its capacity to remain effective. I know personally I have gained a lot more confidence in my ability to lead and communicate with others as a result of my involvement on the club’s Board. Rotary is a complex international service organisation and this can be overwhelming for new members. Unless there is a plan to provide new members with the knowledge they need to take on leadership roles will continue as we currently are. A lack of vitality due to some members, usually the same few, who are expected to lead and are getting tired whilst the other members watch on the side.

As far as the club’s image in the local community I believe an incredible amount of work has been done in the area of youth and older citizens. Perhaps the club needs to target the middle age population which is our recruitment area for new members. Another issue is the club competing with another two local Rotary clubs for resources. Money is not an issue as the three clubs pull together to run the Henley on Todd which is a very good fund raiser. However, recruiting new members is a different story as there is a fair bit of competition between the three clubs. Maybe
H. Third interview, member ID 7

When I reflect on the current plan my conclusion is that it is not working as we only have recruited one new member. Why this is it is difficult to pin point. All the issues indicated by members in the workshops and questionnaires are part of the reasons why the recruitment plan is not working. The lack of leadership in the club is certainly a major issue. Nobody has come up to be President next year and that is a major concern for the club. Obviously we expect everyone to exercise some leadership but the role of President is vital in providing the overall leadership that will inspires and motivates members. It is that lack of vibrancy in the club that concerns me the most.

Getting enough members to be effective is important. When I think about the lack of achievement to date, it may be that as a club we are not working together well enough. I also acknowledge we do not appear to have a member who is good at recruiting new members like some other clubs in town have.

When I assess the implementation of the current plan I must admit to be ignorant as to its progress. For example, how many people have been approached, and what specific initiative used by one group could be used by the other groups. There is no feedback of the plan or information sharing. We seem to be threading water and nothing that I am aware of is happening, and maybe I am wrong.

The lack of planning is an issue in relation to membership growth as well as the operation of the club. The club has some regular activities such as the Henley on Todd, the Old Timers’ Breakfast and Fete that we are all aware of. As for the rest it is not always very clear as to what is being organised in relation to community project, social activities and club business.

The club newsletter is not terribly informative with the exception of the President’s message. It is hard because members are reluctant to come forward and when somebody does there is not the level of energy or commitment necessary to deliver a high standard and we accept that situation. This is a lost opportunity to inform members on what is happening in the club and in Rotary at large.

I believe members are generally fond of the club and perhaps some are staying out of habit or loyalty. However, this is a dangerous situation with only about twenty members. Unless there is a sense of urgency about recruiting new members and increasing the club capacity the organisation could quiet easily become ineffective and disappear. The club could quickly go down to 18 or even 16 members and the current fatigue due to recycling the same members to leadership positions will become more acute. Without energy and new members to bring new ideas, freshness, the capacity to effectively operate as a service club will be lost. This is a catch 22 as to be attractive to new members the club must be seem as a vibrant and effective contributor in the local community.

On the issue of Rotary knowledge I would say many club members only have a limited knowledge of the operation of a Rotary club. I do not believe many club members have attended District Assemblies and/or Conventions which offer great educational opportunities. For example the leadership programs provided at District Assemblies and Conventions are excellent for new members aspiring to take an active role on the Board or as President. Even when it has been offered locally, information sessions on Rotary have generally not been well attended. Mentoring new members is an important aspect of succession planning for the club. I have a
strong feeling about Directors saying they have nothing to report. There are so many things happening in the world of Rotary, but that comes down to being prepared. Everyone has to work and put some efforts in providing value for the club and its members. I have always felt that Avenues of Service should be more of a team. For example if the Director is away a member of that committee should give a report. This is an opportunity for members to learn new skills, get some experience and show leadership. I believe that type of team spirit would lead to more vibrancy within the club.

Vibrancy goes with motivation and from my experience people are motivated by different things. For some it may be community service work such as serving food at the Old Timers’ Fete. For others it will be vocational activities such as working with youth or getting to know another member’s workplace. We need to be balanced in what we do and attract new members without losing the older members. To do that the club must communicate better, keep members informed and involved. The club should try to offer a range of activities that will motivate members with different aspirations.

In conclusion I would say the club has an issue with leadership, communication, planning and mentoring. The current membership drain due to resignation, transfer and retirement requires urgent action or the club will not have the capacity to survive. Not having a functional club Service committee is an issue that has a negative impact of the club’s ability to move forward. Members say the club needs more community projects to raise its profile and attract new members. However it is the chicken and the egg story and what comes first. Unless existing members are prepared to be involved in leading the club and getting new members there will not be the capacity to be doing more in the community.
I. 2nd cycle first questionnaire February 2008

Question 1 – By what measure would you assess the club’s capacity to be healthy and positively contributes to Rotary and the community?

- Small numbers, but good capacity to contribute, and be committed and hard working. Money should be carefully managed to ensure viability – not all spent just because its there.

- Membership of our club is and always was a struggle, we seem to get good members and then keep loosing them for reasons out of our control. I think we are a good club, we get on well together and I can’t remember any serious conflict between members. Maybe we should spend most of our money on one big local project. That way we could get good publicity without having to beg for it. No good sharing with one of the other Rotary clubs, because it usually promotes them (similar name). While doing this project we should be able to attract some new members.

- It needs to have one of two things:
  1. Many members that don’t need to volunteer too much of their time or,
  2. A few members that can volunteer heaps of their time.

- Small but committed membership, substantial money to give to worthy causes, members like to be involved in projects, members involved in community & so represent positively Rotary in that community.

- Diversity of membership &
  Cooperation & friendliness/friendship between members.
  Positive marketing about Rotary. (I don’t think people know what Rotary really does!)
  Sufficient funds to carry out activities successfully.

- Number of quality members. Teamwork, participating in the community regularly. Assisting various groups with funding to assist them in meeting particular needs.

- Healthy, strong membership, have fun, meetings that are interesting and informative. A club that is organised, and positively contributes to the community and the ideals of Rotary
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2 – Is the club measuring up to your expectations? If the answer is no, what change do you believe have to be implemented to build the club’s capacity and meet your expectations?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The club itself measures up, but it needs more members so that the few are not “flogged” beyond their capacity – they get tired and either don’t participate or leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I certainly enjoy attending meetings and the type of service work I can contribute well. I absolutely hate the idea to pester business for gifts, donations or discounts because it is for a service club. If we have to do it, it always should be on business terms, meaning we have something to offer in return e.g. advertising. Almost nobody likes doorknocking for other organisations, why do we do it? It only makes members feel bad if they don’t participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I’d prefer more members and fortnightly meetings – I think the two go hand in hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I’s capacity to “measure up” varies with number of members, and therefore the amount of energy in the club. I feel frustrated that there is such a tight rein on funds, although this has changed a bit. We need new, energetic members to kick things along a bit and some local projects to work with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Not sure at this stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I think we need to be more active in the community as we are not being seen often enough. Outside Old Timers and HOT we are not seen enough by the general community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Within the circumstances I believe it is. With the hard work hard that is occurring, it is difficult to have high expectations. Rotary requires efforts on the part of all Rotarians. With the pending departure of some members there is the expectation of Rotarian increasing membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3 – As a Rotarian, what role/responsibilities do you believe you personally have in building the club capacity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Every one of us has the responsibility to build the club capacity. Doing nothing and sitting on one’s hands is not an option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– As a member of many years I like to contribute, attend meetings, do the type of service work I feel competent at and where I am convinced of what we are doing is a good thing. We do need more members but recruiting is not my strongest point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– I believe I own some responsibility in increasing club membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Be available to help, try &amp; find new members, suggest activities/projects, and spread the word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– I believe it is my responsibility to participate at Rotary functions/activities. Follow the 4 Rotary principles Promote Rotary where possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– When the opportunity arises you obviously promote Rotary but many responses are that they have a positive attitude but are too busy to commit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– I am currently in a responsible role with the club. I have an expectation of bringing at least one person in and that is a responsibility we all share.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
J. 2\textsuperscript{nd} cycle second questionnaire

The second questionnaire specifically targeted individual members and his/her personal involvement in building club capacity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 – What I am doing to promote Rotary and my club?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Nothing at present - too busy at work and also winding down to retirement and leaving the club – sounds like a cop out, but not meant to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Talk about public events e.g. Nepal night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Only promoting with family and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Participate in all club activities and explain to others what Rotary is about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Participate in Rotary activities. Talking to potential members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– I bring up Rotary in casual conversation and suggest it to friends that I think could benefit from it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– When I meet people I ask them if they know about Rotary &amp; attempt to get them to come along to a meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– I am currently trying to recruit new members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2 – How am I using my connections with other individuals and organisations that have resources and information that could benefit Rotary and my club?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– I mention Rotary often when “out and about” always on the lookout for something/someone beneficial to club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Through St Philips, I bring projects to the club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Not completely active in this area. Depends on opportunity &amp; appropriateness of discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– One raises Rotary when any opportunity arises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– In the past fortnight I have asked one person in my contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Hard to answer in this small area, but it is helpful knowing people in a variety of small businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Old Timers’ Fete – assistance from A/S Resort in cooking curry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Grey light disco – My contacts donate for Old Timers’ Breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– The people I ask are associates from my work, my community involvement and personal friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 3 – How much personal control I have taken toward achieving the goal of increasing the club’s capacity? i.e. membership growth

- In the past, a member of the District Membership Committee. Very active then and at that time we had a membership officer in the club (as part of Club Service). It was a requirement of District (and may still be) that we have that position. Since we stopped having that position, we have lost the focus that a specialised position brings – the struggle has been left to the President who really should not have to take on this whole burden himself
- Not much!
- Up to me, but have not been actively trying increase club membership. Still understanding what Rotary does.
- Have spoken to those who could have something to offer the club but most are too busy to commit
- Significant control within the circumstances, have to keep trying
- I am careful not to be too forceful about membership, but rather raise it politely and without the hard sell. I don’t want to scare people off
- Regularly try to recruit new members – invite people to meetings
- I am asking many people, and yet I need much courage in doing so, as I am never really sure how they will react

Question 4 – How is what I am doing enhancing the ability of club members to work together to take collective action and improve the club versus responding to club’s needs individually or relying on others to take care of club’s problems and needs?

- I’m not sure how to answer this question. I think we all recognise the need to work together to improve the club – where we fail is at the “action” step. There is a need for a member dedicated to push the membership drive, and motivate others to make it happen. We need to recognise that if the club does not do that, then its long term survival as a separate club is at risk through sheer lack of critical mass to operate properly. To have this happen would be a tragedy when the solution is in our own hands.
- Make suggestions & help out when possible & acknowledge members efforts.
- I have actively participated in club events e.g. Old Timers and special HOT celebration. I have also joined the HOT committee as one of our club’s reps.
- Limited ability to assist with growth of club but regularly participate
- As President I’m trying to balance the tensions between fun and active involvement of all members, the use of good ideas by certain individuals and my own responsibilities in term of coordinating meetings
- I try to volunteer to help in any way possible with group activities that help the club and not just individuals
- Please explain?
- I hope my efforts make meetings and Rotary good fun, and that we look to be making a difference. I am always trying to be involved in solving problems, although I might be part of the problem!
K. 2nd cycle third questionnaire

A third questionnaire was distributed with the aim to gauge club members’ motivation to take on a leadership position on the Board and what had been their best Rotary experience and why?

The first question asked members to comment on Board positions and attracted the following responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>From past president comments were mostly positive with some indicating the experience to be extremely rewarding and having contributed to personal growth. From members who have not being president some indicated being interested but wanting more experience with the majority of respondents saying they were not particularly interested in the role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Members responses were cautious with previous secretary indicating having found the role interesting but being out of their depth and would have liked to know more about the role. Members who have not been secretary ranged from those interested and recognising the learning opportunities associated with the position which they would like to try when they have more experience. No respondents said they would not want to take on the role of secretary one day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Attracted the less positive responses from members. Only one member indicated having exercised the position with “confidence and pleasure”. Those who had been treasurer related to the experience as “Difficult, being out of my depth, not enjoyable”. Members who had not been treasurer indicated not being interested due to a lack of knowledge and not wanting the responsibility associated with managing the club’s finance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Service Director</td>
<td>From past club service director responses were mostly positives. However, some described the experience as “challenging and rewarding” and “not having a clue and little support”. Members who have not been in the role indicated it would be “opportunity to learn the rules” with some being reluctant to volunteer for the position has it leads to the presidency of the club.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Service Director</td>
<td>Most respondents indicated the position to be one where a member can make a positive contribution but time consuming. Members who have been community service directors indicated the position to bring opportunities to “have fun” and “help those less fortunate community members”. Some members indicated enjoying contributing as workers but not being interested to be an “organiser”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocational Service Director</td>
<td>Members were mostly positive about the role with those who had served as vocational service director highlighting the enjoyment associated with “having a focus on youth development programs”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Service Director</td>
<td>Members were mostly positive about the role from experience or interest in learning about it and becoming more involved in the international aspects of Rotary.</td>
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A few older members who have exercised a number of Board appointments including president indicated “having no further interest in leading” and being content to “continue contributing as a club member”.

The second question asked members to list what had been their best Rotary experience and why.

Most respondents associated their best experience with community service such as “Henley on Todd, Australia Day Breakfast with old timers”, helping others “Giving something of myself back to the community”, and working with young people to “give them opportunities”. Working with other club members and members of the other town service clubs sharing similar goals was also listed as rewarding. As one member put it “there is a real sense of community when the three Alice Springs Rotary clubs work together at the Henley on Todd for the good of the local community”. A few members indicated their year as president of the club to being their best Rotary experience.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>Please comments on what seem to be going on there? When, where, why, who, how and with what consequences</th>
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| The lack of leadership may be caused by members feeling that if they mention anything it’s going to land on them to run it. Therefore the attitude is: better to sit back and say nothing because “I can’t manage right now”, or there is a feeling of a lack of support from other members. | – Yes. There’s a distinct lack of circular energy.  
– I feel that I have suggested several things at Rotary, and I don’t believe I have got stuck with any of them.  
– Relative to other organisations that I am involved with, I have been amazed at the amount of support that our group of Rotarians gives.  
– Agree.  
– Yes I think this statement is true. Maybe if we all made a commitment to support each other in various projects, even if the support is small by all it makes it so much easier, than a few doing the majority of the work.  
– With a relatively small Club, we need to only take on projects that we can fully execute. We must know when to say “no”. |
| What we have tended to do is put new members into leadership roles without having any real grounding behind it and I think we’ve almost set ourselves to fail. What we do is put people into what I would say is an executive role with no training on the ground and then we expect them to run the ship. | – Yes.  
– One of the reasons that I joined Rotary was as a way to be out of my comfort zone as I felt it was a group of people that were willing to let people have a go and learn by doing. Rotarians have been more than willing to help with advice and assistance... if you ask 😊  
– Yes but if we can’t fond experienced leaders, then what? Do we tell some new members we just “volunteered” every day what to do?  
– It’s important that new members feel part of the team, and part of that role is to get involved. It’s important that they are trained and supported as much as possible.  
– I don’t necessary think this is a bad thing. New members bring new ideas I haven’t seen the down side of this. |
| So why not lead and make a change? This is really what I would say. Try to think what type of I I really want, what sort of people I want to invite in the I? | – Go to top question.  
– So why not lead and make a change – hmm I think I am going to give that a go... with support from the board and especially the hard work that has been done by Jean-Luc.  
– Well said.  
– People that have something to give i.e. their time, effort or innovative ideas or leadership or simply wanting to help & make a difference in this world.  
– It can be a big commitment therefore members may be hesitant to volunteer to lead. |
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<th>PLANNING</th>
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<td>Members are not committed to the plan and helping with the plan. After the weekly meeting members go back to their world and Rotary may not resurface for a week.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>Yes.</td>
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|  | Yes. | I agree with what the PETS team advised... which was that most clubs will have 2 or 3 “people” persons that will be responsible for getting most of the new members along. I am striving to think of ways to make existing members value & be aware of the membership benefits more so that they can put that out in the community... a bit like when you leave a really good movie you tend to tell people about it. |
|  | Yes. | Agree we need to report each week on attempts to bring new people here. |
|  | Yes. | I agree with this. We should target certain parts of the business community. Given this specific interest, the new potential member will feel “special”. |

| The problem is we do not have a realistic strategy to get new members in. We probably need to ask 10 people to get one or two in. The bigger the number you ask the more chances to get some people in. So members need to do a lot more. | Yes. | I agree with what the PETS team advised... which was that most clubs will have 2 or 3 “people” persons that will be responsible for getting most of the new members along. I am striving to think of ways to make existing members value & be aware of the membership benefits more so that they can put that out in the community... a bit like when you leave a really good movie you tend to tell people about it. |
| | Yes. | Agree we need to report each week on attempts to bring new people here. |
| | Yes. | I agree with this. We should target certain parts of the business community. Given this specific interest, the new potential member will feel “special”. |

| There is an issue of committees not meeting regularly. We have many weekly meetings but very little else. | Yes. | I think trying to have committee meetings within weekly meetings has failed. |
| | Yes. | I think, the committees meeting regularly is a bit of a Catch-22. We have a H.O.T. committee that meets regularly and provides feedback to the meeting. However due to lack of members we are not necessarily getting the flow of ideas from the community to provide possibilities for discussion. I have also been involved in an organisation that had meetings for the sake of meetings – this was FAR FAR worse than not meeting regularly!!!! There is also an issue of quite a few people being interstate for work for extended periods of time and/or regular short times... hopefully we can use electronic communications such as emails to increase communication without overburdening people with having to be at another place and time for another meeting. |
- For simple tasks it is not really necessary to have lengthy meetings.
- True comments about committees not meeting regularly.
- Some truth to this. Perhaps allowing one meeting per month be dedicated to committee meetings would be good.

### Communication

**One major difference, with our I and other Rotary Clubs I have visited, is the greater amount of feedback concerning outgoing activities and projects they provide their members at their regular meetings.**

- Don’t know – don’t really go to other Clubs.
- Hard for me to comment on as I have not been to other Rotary clubs... however as mentioned previously the H.O.T. committee provides regular feedback. The BBQ trailer project has been regularly reported on... if people want more then perhaps we can utilise the new structure so they can volunteer to be involved in more.
- This could be because we trust our Board to do the right thing.
- Unable to comment. I have not attended another Cub’s meeting.
- ?

**At our weekly meeting, everything is discussed in a sentence or two and there is no sharing between the groups. Sometimes other members may even talk about a different issue and not listen.**

- Doesn’t strike me as a problem.
- It is my understanding that the new structure is to encourage everyone to become involved in what they are interested in and contribute as much or as little as they are able across any of the four avenues of service. As to members not listening to reports... as we are all volunteers there is not much that can be done to fix that issue other than expelling them from the club? Seriously though, maybe we can look at changing the seating arrangements to try different layouts... such as T shape with a top table and the members sitting at 90 degrees on both sides... circular... the acoustics are not perfect in our meeting room... perhaps we should ask to use the bar area for every meeting as it seems quieter to me?????
- As above and there is not enough time to go into lengthy discussions.
- Yes the statement is correct. A positive thing about our Club is the friendly interaction, laughs and enjoyment during meetings i.e. our sergeant.
- Somewhat agree.

### Motivation

**The entire Club membership needs to be motivated and contribute if the membership plan is to**

- Yes!
- Until I was International Service director I thought that there was an incredible amount of behind the scenes work... and then I learned that there is a lot of fun times at board meetings, a bit of regular effort
succeed. It may be that as a I we are not working together well enough. I feel a bit that way myself as well as being reluctant to get too involved because of my current work and personal commitments.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>I don’t know how to deal with the motivation issue? I think people are very busy and from my own experience the older you get the busier you get. I think we need to go back and refocus a bit more on what is Rotary. Why are we there? And try to motivate members because I must admit I sometimes leave a meeting thinking there wasn’t a lot other than we were there.</th>
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<td>each week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– I am sure that newer members greatly over estimate the amount of time/work that is required to be involved. Of course it always helps if everybody is motivated and helping together😊</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Yes but maybe members are content with the way things are.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Motivation is an important part of all teams. Maybe a Club weekend lunch where we can workshop the Clubs vision, objectives, plan etc. Get some involvement, commitment &amp; inclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– A group discussion on who we would like to bring into the club would be good i.e. police, fire, magistrates…</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Some motivation can come from education (hopefully this will come as we adapt to the new structure), some from a sense of achievement and some from a sense of looking/moving forward. I assume that when I am older I will be less busy as I won’t be driving 4 kids to different venues for different events.</td>
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<td>– Every meeting that I attend means that I am late arriving at my job that provides me the income that is needed to maintain a presence at Rotary. Sometimes I leave the meeting feeling a bit of relief that I wasn’t there (at my job)! In this fast paced world, is it necessarily wrong for us to “just be there” sometimes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>– I don’t know either since we can’t offer any money it is a problem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Motivation is an important part of all teams. Maybe a Club weekend lunch where we can workshop the Clubs vision, objectives, plan etc. Get some involvement, commitment &amp; inclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Most members have busy lives, (work, family, sports, etc.) which leaves little time for Rotary. Then rotary is 1hr per week at minimum.</td>
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<td>– The time commitment is a causal factor of low membership motivation.</td>
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M. 2nd cycle fifth questionnaire

The fifth and last questionnaire was made up of two sections. The first section asked club members to indicate their agreement, disagreement or uncertainty concerning findings related to definitions of leadership, planning and communication. Those definitions were constructed from the responses provided by members in previous questionnaires.

On leadership, most respondents agreed that leadership is about positioning the club to remain effective in a changing society whilst remaining true to the Rotary ideals. All respondents agreed with the importance of managing change using a process of communication, evaluation and review. Most respondents agreed that the effectiveness of the leader is dependant on the level of support and participation demonstrated by followers. Most respondents also agreed that involving members in the club’s planning process would contribute to delivering a plan that would motivate members. On the relationship between operational effectiveness and organisational knowledge most respondents agreed that understanding what the organisation stands for is necessary to achieving the organisation’s goals.

The second section of the questionnaire asked respondents to similarly rank their understanding of:

- The aims of the new club leadership plan?
- How it will work?
- What is their individual role in the plan?

Whilst most respondents indicated to understand the aims of the club leadership plan only half the respondents were confident about their understanding of how the plan is to work and their role in it.

N. Fourth interview, member ID 05

I think one of the problems the club has with people taking positions on the Board of Directors is because of the lack of energy in the club and knowing that if you put your hand up as a Director then it is really hard to get people motivated behind you to do things. Another issue, and I speak about myself, is that I have taken on a committee but I really only once have had a meeting with my group so it is a bit like a dog chasing its tail. On one end I am saying you don’t want to volunteer because you know there is not going to be that energy behind you and on the other end as a leader I am not encouraging that energy. And I rather suspect this is the situation with most of the other Directors. Now I wonder whether I am not directly responsible for that because when I was President in my usual very efficient way I decided that because we do meet once a week, that’s a big commitment anyhow, and rather than meeting on another occasion once a month with the Directors and their groups to discuss whatever it was that had to be discussed within the club but the reality of that is people are never there, the group you need to get together are never there at the same time and that is not to say the they would be there at a meeting called after hours but I just wonder whether that in a sense has undermined that process a bit and I rather suspect it might have. So that’s one thing, the other thing is there is not a lot of energy in the club therefore you don’t put a lot of energy back in because it’s sort of like well you don’t have to really because nearly no one else is and that’s a really pathetic attitude to take but it all feeds of itself I think. Another issue is attendance, one member related to his experience when he spoke to people about attending weekly morning meetings and they though “you must be kidding”. The other thing I
think is for me attending is a sort of a habit. I come to the morning meeting on my way to work so it’s not a big deal. But I can see that for some people it would be an issue because if you are not a morning person, if you scramble to come to work on time anyhow, then a morning meeting is a problem. Another issue with a morning meeting and probably why or possibly why there is not a real cohesion within the club is because there is no socialising before or after the meeting. There is only literally 5 minutes if you get there before or 5 minutes after if you are not in a rush to get to work, and I thing that in itself makes it hard if you want to recruit people. By contrast if you go to the club meeting in the evening, it’s a very social sort of an event with the meeting in the middle. If you are looking at inviting someone to join the club and if they are new to town, or wanting to increase their network that has a lot more appeal than being in and out of a meeting. An hour meeting has an appeal for some people but it is a more limited appeal and I think the breakfast meeting is an issue.

On attendance what is more relevant, as a club, would be to find out what’s wrong with members who are not attending and if we can help with something, otherwise as a club it says we don’t care about our members and maybe that’s something that we should investigate.

On the issue of lack of energy, well I guess it is because a number of our members aren’t there a lot. Often out of our twenty or so membership there is only about sixteen involved. I guess most of those who have done a stint or more on the Board, like I have, are looking for a break and next year I am definitively not involved. I know if everyone thing that way it is negative and the club basically cease to exist. I am sure the other people sitting on the side are all thinking exactly how I am thinking which is “I have done my bit someone else should do it now”. I don’t know if the reality is that three club for a town the size of Alice Springs is very ambitious these days or not? I sort of liken this to volunteer community involvement at school. For example years ago when we had a meet the Headmaster night the hall was pack. Now its not that the Headmaster has done anything, he is still very popular but people don’t bother coming. You get only about twenty people turn up which is really unheard of in the past. When you then speak to those people and say “you did not come the other night” you get “no no I had do this or I just got home from work” and so it like people have good intentions and a good will about things but they just don’t want to get involved, they don’t want to have to commit to doing anything in particular unless it is a one off, which is again what we find with the club. So the Parents and Friends Association which I am sure you will remember was very vibrant has now died off. No matter what we do the most we ever get is twenty on the first night of the year when we had a speaker on home work and English and the rest of the time if you get four people it’s really exciting and again it’s not that the parents are not interested it’s just that they don’t want to come to a meeting. Yet if we are having an event and you ring and ask can you come on Friday night to a quiz night they’ll say yes but don’t ask me to go to a meeting and don’t ask me to be on a committee and don’t ask me to have to do something on a regular basis so you know I think this is a general issue.

When you look at the other two Rotary clubs previous problem with membership and the position we are in now you can see the similarity. One resolved it problem by changing its meeting time and it has made a huge difference. The other allowed women and that gave them access to the other half of the population, after studiously ignoring it, so what do we do?
The other thing, I think, is that attracting membership maybe difficult because if you are a project driven person, if you like to join a group because what they do is what you want to do, there is not a sense of that stuff happening in our club. I just wonder if we had some clearly identified and very high profile projects in town wether that would give our club more credibility because the things we do i.e. Old Timers, great, the Australia Day’s breakfast, we help at H.O.T. this is a big major thing and we give money to various things but you do not get any public recognition in the paper. Maybe if we should go back to projects like the one we did at the Alice Springs Day Care Centre where we did painting. That was very real, all the parents would have heard about that, you could see it and we enjoyed it as it was a very positive thing to do which didn’t actually cost much money. So it’s probably a combination of things and again if I am going to invite somebody to join the club it would be great to have a calendar that shows the projects we plan to do. Members can then work out where they can contribute. Then also recognition I think which we sort of do when you attend those working bees that you have effectively made up a meeting because you already have done you bit. Maybe that is something we can do, a way of adjusting things as far as the expectation of having to attend every weekly meeting.

In a way it is that sense of obligation to do it rather than the desire to do it that is feeding the lack of energy. Because if absolutely no one is prepared to put their hand up to take on one of the role then for me its like well I am staying in the club and if I am staying in the club then I better put my hand up. Otherwise it’s not fair to anyone to have 14 people sitting on their hands because they have every rights to think “I have done my bit” every right to think “it’s someone else’s turn” which is our current situation. And yet by putting my hand up it’s a bit like this year I though poor President, he hasn’t got any support and what the heck I’ll take it on and see what I can do but there is the cruncher, I’ll do what I can which was basically the least possible and I am not alone in that. So, in effect its sort of adding to the downward spiral because instead of saying “right I am going to take it on to achieve the best year for my committee”, its more like “I’ll try to do something” so in a sense its like how do you break the spiral, do you sit on your hands and say no I am not going to do it. So the club is in crisis and what do we do about it? We get real about recruiting or we say the club is over and join one of the other clubs. I suppose it’s a hard approach but you can’t keep going doing nothing because I think it will get worse because if I take it on again, if somebody else takes it on again and whoever it is that takes it on again I imagine they’ll have less energy than they did this year for next year and that’s not helping anyone. In the long tern it’s not helping the club at all it is just delaying the end result.

On the issue of meeting content, I suppose it’s a matter of balance as to what you do at meetings. Having somebody like the Darwin Sunrise Rotary member talk about her personal experience with Polioplus in India made it very interesting to hear about real action in Rotary. I though that was an interesting meeting with relevant information being provided and I learned a little bit more about what Rotary does that I could get involved in if I wanted to. So that’s good and maybe that’s one area that can be explored. I guess another thing with new members is that sense that if you introduce someone you then have to look after them. Its sound a bit pathetic, but its an added responsibility which shouldn’t be a big drama but its something that run through your mind because you can’t have them join and essentially leave them to it. So a lots of little things I suppose. I don’t know if the President should get dramatic
and say if we don’t have any nominees and if we don’t get new members then the club should seriously think of closing and members join the other 2 clubs. Maybe that will make members take a deep breath and become more involved and do something about it.

O. Fifth interview, member ID 18

The process to this point has been really interesting from my perspective, because I have seen it sort of whine and flux so to speak. We’ll have our meeting, we talk about and come up with what we think are some really good ideas, start to pursue them and then find it didn’t get met with the enthusiasm one would have expected specially for something as important as membership. The next thing is, as we’ve progressed it seemed like nobody really asked any questions about what we were doing or why we did what we did. So it didn’t even ignite even just a little bit of interest which is again a bit disappointing. I know that with the material you’ve put out they’ve been times when I have been tardy and not come back very well and so again if that’s indicative of what has been happening in the club it reflects on the difficulties that you’ve had I guess in trying to get information when it comes to formalise the processes. We’ve had the instances where we’ve gathered the names of potential members from various groups within the club and sent letter. We know from six approaches made we didn’t get a bite.

Using the four Avenues of Service as recruiting groups and the idea that we may have a bit of competition between them never came to any fruition. Nobody was enthused enough and yet I am sure in your responses you would’ve had members indicating being embarrassed to ask people to come along because the club is not vibrant enough. Are they actually embarrassed about it? So why not make a change, this is what I would say.

If I was to point the fingers, I guess there has been a little lack of leadership with the people who are in charge of the Avenues of Service. They are working for the club, Rotary and all the rest of it but they are not taking the time to learn about the programs themselves prior to the start of the year so in this period where we have got this lead up to the change over there is probably not enough planning happening. They find themselves as the new Directors after June/July and all of a sudden it’s we got a budget to get going and what programs we’re going to run? What are we going to do this year? And by the time they’ve worked out what they’re going to do well it’s almost November and time to plan for who is going to be in charge next year. If I was to reflect on what is happening with the club and why it look like it’s stagnating my view is that we are not having our programs organised prior to the start of the year. So a criticism would be that leadership, imparting information and learning about the international program that we can use, tends to make it so that the club appears to be stagnating. I just think that we are being reactive rather than being strategic about what we do, in saying that I am probably the worse person in term of strategy, but that is how I’m seeing this all issue. Lets look at membership lets look at it in the pieces, the blocks lets build it up so that everybody understand it and gets involved. Strategies and programs for membership and bringing people into Rotary have existed for a long period of time and are well defined. The problem is that many do not have the knowledge or the experience to recruit new members i.e. we probably have to be asking ten people to get in one or two. So people really need to do a lot more.
One of the philosophies associated with Rotary is for members to be cross pollinating with other clubs. That means when they are away they do make ups, when they’ve missed a meeting here in Alice Springs they go to another club in Alice Springs to do a make up. This is an opportunity to see and learn what is happening in other clubs. The best organisations in the world end up being the best organisations in the world because they look into other organisations look into themselves and then look at world best practice and adopt or adapt it for themselves. I think our club tends to be a little bit local centric at the present time. I know I am going to harp on about local centric, but you know, being local centric is not helping our cause because we tend to be waiting for something to crop up locally to for us to go on and attack and be involved in and all the rest of it, but in fact there is staff happening all the time elsewhere that we could be participating in.

Our club membership is ageing and one of the threats to us is people approaching retirement. We’ve got members that appear to be enthusiastic, and we also have some members who are very tired whilst other members don’t contribute very much at the present time. This is a strain on the rest of the club and maybe we need to do something about that very soon.

If I was to comment on how our meeting unfold each week there are some people who rarely have much input into a meeting. To me that is a frustration because when I bring someone along I want them to see the club for what it is, I mean our club has done great work, when we work together, on things like the Australian Day Breakfast, we all have a great time and we really need to be showing that we can meld and work together and have a good time. That is the role of club Service, to look at the dynamic of the club the running of the club, make sure the club is still vibrant.

The idea that club Service is not keeping an eye on the dynamics of the club is another part of the problem I was talking about. Nothing is going to happen unless there is a plan in place to make it happen. Maybe we are really starting to hit on the problem as we come back to the issue of not being strategic enough.

Yes it comes down to not having someone seating in that role of club Service and not having that committee actively involved. Of course there is the issue that not enough members understand what the ideals of Rotary are. We are a group of people recognised for our ability and our skills within our businesses who have come together in a group to actually work towards world peace by using the skills that we have. If people don’t understand that concept, they do not understand Rotary at all. I think the core understanding that Rotary is striving for world peace through our professional association and networks is missing at the present time. Again we are too local centric sometimes.

The club is suffering from not having defined the programs it wants to pursue, programs that can remain relatively stable over the years as new people are taking over. What I am finding is that each year when someone takes over a directorship they don’t necessary know what programs are available to them within that avenue of service and as a result nothing is planned until the last minute and when they do start to think about what they are doing planning wise, they find out that the timing for everything is completely up to poop and they’ve missed the boat effectively. So really it does comes back to that strategic view about setting the plan in place.

Right now it is all ad hoc and does not work so the club need to take the time to make a formal plan. To not have a plan is to go for a disaster and we all supposed to be professional in what we do. When we bring prospective members, and I am not
saying we need to develop a plan before we bring new members in, and they actually see the worth of what we do and they get involved with the plan and all the rest of it and they feel they are part of it then we will retain our membership as well and this is really important.

P. Sixth interview, member ID 16

I am aware that the club has continually gone through a process of gaining and loosing members due to the local population being very mobile. More recently the losses have been greater than the gains. The challenge we face is no longer to increase the overall membership number but to retain enough members to remain effective. What I am observing is a lower percentage of members now attending the weekly meetings than in the past. The low attendance at meeting is also compounded by a lower number of members prepared to serve the club in position of leadership i.e. on the Board. As a result the club is loosing energy and capacity. Having fewer members reduces the number of contacts outside the club and opportunities to bring in new members. Less members means the remaining members have more work to do to run the club activities. In preparation to taking up the role of President and being relatively new to Rotary I have consulted widely before taking office. My aim was to get fresh ideas and move forward trying to involve as many members as possible in the operation of the club. It has been a learning process for me and one of the issues in implementing new ideas is the limited amount of time available at the weekly meeting. Another issue is the lesser capacity to act as a result of the reduced membership numbers and members not attending. Not having a club Service Director and active committee has not helped since that Avenue of Service is responsible for the well being of the club and its members.

Being President has been a steep learning curve for me trying to learn and hold everything together. Making sure that the group is involved and members have ownership of decision made.

The action research project was seen by many as an opportunity to have a closer look at what we do. To closely examine our operation, how we interact, and how we deal with the challenge of membership. Up to December 2007, we had put a plan in place and tried to implement that plan. Letters have been written to people identified as potential members. I thought if we approached as many people as we could we would have had a chance to attract some new members. Unfortunately I did not get many names from the club and only six letters were sent. I hand delivered those letters and only one recipient responded to say thank you, he had been approached before and was too busy.

When I reflect on the last six months of the membership action plan I realise the importance of everybody working together. I realise that whilst I have certain objectives other members have their own objectives too. Communication is a very important part of getting members on board and involving them in the strategy adopted by the club.

A positive step has been the appointment of a club Service Director and now we need to identify a club Service Director for next year. With the decision to change the membership plan and have club Service drive the membership growth strategy we may have a better chance to achieve our goal. I believe the new strategy relying on all members to look at their network and actively approach people, with club Service providing the central coordination and communication, to be a positive step.
On my personal approach to the membership issue and implementation of the plan I have aimed to be diplomatic. The club has a diverse membership with varied interests and members could easily withdraw from the process if not encouraged to participate. I believe members are well aware of the membership issue and being too forceful about recruitment may not work.

My assessment of the actual involvement by individual members in the membership plan is uncertain at this point in time. I do not know how to gauge how active members have been, as individuals, in trying to bring in new members. My guess is we have a small handful of members who are trying their best to bring in new members and the rest of the members are not very active. Why this is so I am not sure and hopefully you may be able to come up with a reason through your research. To be honest I am feeling a bit disappointed that some members are not pulling their weight behind the club’s plan. However, I know everybody is different and has a different involvement in the club and Rotary. Those different ways to be involved translates in a lower level of motivation towards certain objectives such as not feeling obliged to look for new members.

I return to the fact that not having a club Service Director and Committee to drive the plan has made its implementation much more difficult. Hopefully we will now see a change in the next few months. When I have discussed membership of the club with young people in my network a meeting on Monday morning is not attractive to them. Young people are very active all weekend including Sunday and the last thing they want is having to get up early on Monday morning. Another thing is that many of my friends are not young professionals and they are fully involved in their work and family. Rotary is not attractive to them.

On the issue of Rotary knowledge and experience we learn through practice and personally, knowing what I know now, I can see different ways of doing things. The club has some good foundations in place the problem is not having enough members to be more effective. There is experience on the Board with members who have been involved for a number of years. However, they would like to move on and pass the role to somebody else. By contrast we have members who are happy to attend meetings, seat back and observe without participating. I guess we are all different and that is why the club must have more members including members who are keen to learn and get the experience to lead the club in the future.

Q. Seventh interview, member ID 22

On communication, I would say that although people tend to talk to the people who are on the table they are seating at, there doesn’t appear to be much discussion between tables at such. It’s because I am seating next to Joe that I’ll talk to him about whatever and there does seem to be much depth of discussion on any particular topic. I guess because I am new sometimes I feel it would be good to get more details about whatever the topic is so that I have a deeper understanding. I think because other people have been in the club for years that they know a lot of things they should share their knowledge. Everything is discussed in a sentence or two and there is no sharing between the groups. There are times when someone may be talking about a topic, and another group will be talking about a completely different issue and not listening to the topic that the other person is presenting and for me this is very annoying. I believe if somebody has the courage to stand up and address the club other members should have the respect to listen to what they have to say. They
should also contribute to that conversation rather than talking about their week-end or their breakfast.

Sometime when I have stood up, and I know there are other people talking I feel that what I am saying is probably inappropriate or not relevant to the group. This is compounded by the lack of interaction such as a dead silence once there has been an update on a topic. Surely there could be more discussion on the issue being discussed. It is like we are just ticking off the things that we have to cover in a meeting and then thanks, see you later, and off we go.

To resolve the communication issue I would advocate we apply some house rules. For example:

- When someone is speaking give them the respect of listening to what they have to say.
- Since it has been identified through this research that people believe there are communication issues or lack of communication or people feel there are not informed and if that is true then has a club we should agree to be more interactive and updates given. For example ask further questions about how we are going how many volunteered, exactly what tasks need to be done and the resources needed, and generally be more interactive.
- I also believe that members need to really look at why they have chosen to be a Rotarian. I would be surprised if the answer is: to seat back and watch without actually participating in the meeting or club events.

In relation to leadership, I can see that there are a number of good leaders in our club and some of those people are quiet vocal and have got very good things to say at meetings. I don’t know if members who do not lead feel insecure in themselves by not wanting to lead or they prefer to be followers rather than leaders.

I was thinking of leadership that would make you stand up and say have we though about going to India and be involved in giving people the polio vaccination are we looking that far or only looking in house?

The other comment I was going to make about leadership or one of the reasons why you have a lack of leadership is probably similar to what others have said. When you say we should do X and because there is that lack of energy within the club the person who stands up and say we should do X may feel that it’s going to land on them to run it. So people think “I seat back and say nothing because for whatever reasons I can’t manage” or there is the feeling of lack of support to run that program or agenda if everyone seat back and say no I am to busy which is a valid thing to say if you are genuinely too busy to take part.

In conclusion, I would say that there is a genuine interest by the majority of our club members, and most of the time when I go to the meetings I feel positive. I feel happy that I am part of the club as there is that happy, good feeling at the end of the meeting. What else could I say? I can see that some people genuinely want to be there but then there are other members that I ask myself why are you here. Maybe they do heaps of things behind the scene I don’t know and they are less present during our Monday meeting. I guess, what I see is because I am assuming people have been there for years they’ve fallen into like a rut and they just need that little motivation, like you say: do something different like if you’ve recycled through each of the Directors’ positions like four times then maybe you can co-assist someone who hasn’t done that role and be like a mentor for that person. One you don’t have the full responsibility so you don’t have to say no I am not going to put my hand up because I don’t have the time or I have done it too many times that’s enough but I am
happy to support someone else who’s never done it before or the last time they did it that was four years ago and I am happy to be providing that mentoring role.

R. Eight interview, member ID 14
I suppose in the time I have been in Rotary which must be coming up probably twelve years now I think we’ve been through a couple of cycles but this is the biggest slump that I have observed. I believe we have to think about why people join Rotary? I think the reasons why people join Rotary are significant in the context of how they contribute to Rotary. I guess what I am trying to say is that, and if I can just explain for myself the reason I joined Rotary was because I wanted something for myself having raised a family and then having a period of time when I felt I needed some interactions with other adults and the other aspect was to contribute to the community. I saw Rotary as an opportunity to do have bit of both.

I know you expect a bit of variation when you have a change of people in the context of the President and the Board. I suspect that, and I don’t mean it to sound a critical comment because it’s not intended to be, what we have tended to do is put new people into leadership roles without having any real grounding behind it. As a result we’ve almost set ourselves up to fail and it’s not a criticism of the people at all because I thing they do the best they can do. What we do is put people into what we would say is an executive role, if we were in an employment situation, with no training on the ground and then we expect them to run the ship. As a group we need to be conscious that if we haven’t got the resources ready to draw on we will not succeed. If we are going to put people into role and particularly as Directors or President elect and President’s position, we need to have some strategies to support them, particularly if they’re new folks. So I am not saying don’t put someone who is new in there but they should be prepared for the role they are expected to manage. And this is probably one of the reasons why I liked the model that was proposed at the last change over where we had different ways of doing it because I think it did share the load and it had the potential to be more engaging for members.

In the club we’ve got some dominant personalities and the people who are less dominant can be over shadowed and perhaps we don’t draw the best out in those folks. I don’t know if that’s an area we need to look at? I suspect if we are really honest with ourselves it probably is. I suspect often by default rather than intent we leave the support of new people to whoever may decide to take it on so maybe we need to be a bit more structured around that. In the context of the Board I think we also need to look at how the Board’s function ands what comes out of the Board. I believe the Board should report back to the members on a regular basis after its meeting so members are more engaged with what’s going on.

From my own point of view it’s not that I am not interested in Rotary ways because I joined the organisation out of interest for what it does. When the opportunity came up I choose Rotary in preference to other groups because I had an idea about the things that were involved in from an arm length if you like. There was that level of interest because what I perceived it to be. We need to be more effective within the club and because we’ve got dwindling numbers it’s difficult. But if Directors are more committed to giving some sort of information even if it’s just a very small amount of feed back about what is happening within the portfolio it will help. I know this has been encouraged more recently because we are getting less “nothing to report” from Directors.
I don’t know how you deal with the motivation issue? I think people are very busy, and from my own experience the older you get the busier you seem to get. As I said earlier, if we were to provide more meaningful information for members at Rotary meetings there would be a flow on effect of motivation and better energy. I would like to see is that we went back to having a plan for the year with every member knowing, within reason, what activities are planned. For example, this month is vocational month and next month we have a guest speaker and a 1 member presenting a particular topic about Rotary. I think we’ve lost that ability to provide information relevant to members’ education because we don’t have people talking about different aspects of Rotary. To go back to this practice would increase the level of interest by providing members with relevant Rotary information.

I think we need to go back and refocus a bit more about what is Rotary? Why are we there? And try to motivate people through because I must admit I sometimes leave a intend meeting and think really there wasn’t a lot except from just being there. Personally I intend to continue in my current role next year because I think people doing more than one year is a good way of managing projects and provide continuity. On the membership issue, I am really concerned about our numbers now and I am one of those people that found it difficult to get people to come along. We need to keep trying I suppose.

To get back to this puzzle (leadership, motivation, problem solving and energy) I do think that we need to be putting some onus back on the Board for taking responsibility, and not just the President but all Board members, to try to keep people motivated. As Directors we must engage better with our committees then we are each keeping a group of people motivated in one way or another. My experience has been that it is actually quiet easy for the Directors of the committees to take responsibility for everything instead of sharing it. As a result, the other committee members think what on earth is going on what I am doing? However, if Directors give people carriage of certain things at particular times and delegate then you are more likely to have motivation.

As far as the energy goes I think that flows from the motivation and leadership pretty much in my view. The problem solving is actually effective if you have the 3 other things working well because I think we can all seat down and say well this is how it is and this what we can do but I am too busy we’ve tried before. You know what I mean where I think if we’ve got the other 3 things happening in sync then this takes care of itself almost. At the District conference at Port Lincoln we had a women speaker who talked about the pit people and I actually think a lot of us are almost at the bottom of the pit. She did a diagram with all these little bods and they were down in the pit and she referred to them as the pit people and her simple analogy was if you don’t get out of the pit then you are finished. It was about helping each other and for those who are less motivated at a point in time to get the others engaged into giving them a hand or follow up, pay some attention and find out what the issues are. I am not sure we actually do that very well either but I just feel we’re heading for the pit.

I really thing we need to have a plan that members can work to and I think the President has a responsibility to develop that. Hand out a plan that might have some gaps in it and get the members to contribute to it. Set it out so that you have your theme for the month, you have a time when it’s Rotary education staff and I know we have to do our plan after PETS and start to work towards that but I feel that has been a little bit haddock but that could be my perception. Because I must admit I have been pretty inconsistent in lots of way because I have had a lot of things on my plate.

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I guess I would think Jean-Luc when you’ve put this together it would be really good if we could have the District Governor and some other people part of the feedback so that they could understand some of the issues because I think this has been a great process and I think it would apply across a lot of Clubs and so if they were involved in some of this feedback or however you do it then maybe they can also assist us. I sometime ask myself if we are at the stage where we are going to be absorbed within another I. I mean if that’s how it goes!