THE CHALLENGE OF PERFORMANCE, LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores an intervention with a public sector group. It considers the issue of performance management and development, the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements and how it could be improved. The project allows for a rare opportunity to look at a system which essentially has remained embedded for a considerable amount of time. An action research approach was used based on constructivist research philosophy. Principles and practices of action research and grounded theory aided in the design of the project by using a participatory approach, allowing issues to emerge and using reflection techniques with mentors and critical friends. Mind mapping was a significant tool in managing and ensuring outcomes were grounded in the data.

The project identified the difficulties confronted by organisations and their people. From an organisational perspective, change is a constant, and looking for ways to help people improve performance and leadership capabilities is a given. On the other hand, people seemed change fatigued, had limited time and experience high workloads and pressures. In an environment which is high on control and constantly undergoing restructures and reviews, is it realistic to expect people will display high levels of performance, innovation, leadership, flexibility and learning? What did seem to be apparent was a disconnect between people and the organisation in attempting to recreate a sense of belonging and ownership in the ever-changing work environment. Systems like performance management in the main remain unquestioned even though the value added for individuals, groups and the organisation is dubious! Everyone goes through the motions of filling in forms and ticking boxes.

Attempts were made to help the group to reflect and learn using action learning and group behaviour approaches. In-depth reflection and learning seemed difficult for the group. The reflective process using mentors and critical friends for the researcher had demonstrable value in helping to gain insights for the self. The intervention generated local theory in the areas of: the mixed message factor; the ‘me’ factor; the non-performance factor; the inhibited communication factor; the
blame and complain factor, the ‘stuckedness’ factor, the leadership “suppressor” factor; and the ostrich disconnect factor. Aiding a group to understand its worldview and repetitive behaviour patterns may help with change. Being stuck and resistant to change limits learning and reproduces what has always been done. All that is achieved is disconnection from the whole and dysfunctional behaviours.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
Chapter 1:

- Describes the research project.
- Outlines environmental drivers operating within the public sector.
- Discusses the overall methodology to be used with the project.
- Confirms the project’s objective, theoretical outcomes and development of local theory.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction outlines the research project that was identified in a public sector agency and the drivers that exist in this work environment. The overall methodology to be used to attempt to help the project group is also discussed. Research project objectives, theoretical outcomes and development of local theory are also considered.

BACKGROUND

Large organisations are constantly in a state of change. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers [1998:9] confirm that “…we participate in a world where change is all there is”. There would probably be very few people who would argue that this is the case in the public sector. Managers are constantly being told that they need to work smarter and harder with diminishing resources. Then there are pressures from superiors above and pressures from staff below. Everyone wants something yesterday so the working day gets longer and at the same time
employees are told that they work in a family friendly environment. These
dichotomies create tensions of difference, uncertainty and insecurity.

Superimpose these pressures with constant reviews and restructures and an
image starts to emerge of the environment people work in. Consultants are
regularly bought in to tell people what’s working and what isn’t in their part of the
organisation. People generally seem to feel demoralised, disempowered and
unhappy. One of the few drivers is to continue to strive for that next promotion,
which more often than not includes more staff and more responsibility!
Workloads are often considered relentless and unsustainable with no lessening in
sight.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This dissertation discusses an intervention with a group of professionals
operating in a public sector environment. The group had just been restructured
and reviewed by an external consultant. The key issues identified in the review
were gaps in leadership and financial skill sets for program and project leaders.

The research project objective was to consider whether ‘performance
management works in the public sector’ and improve on the current
arrangements that were in place for the group.

Along the way the research demonstrated that it was difficult to exclusively focus
on performance management. Issues started to emerge in terms of change
management, behavioural and attitudinal reactions and leadership capabilities.
Mant [1997:51] makes reference to such system thinking and uses the frog/bike
metaphor when describing organisations. He says:

Most organisational systems contain bikish and frogfish bits – that is, bikish
parts which can be hived off and reattached in a new way without harming
the overall system, and froggish parts which really are part of the core
process. If you remove them, you damage the whole. [1997:51]
It was with this notion in mind that the research project commenced. Often it is difficult to reduce everything to a nice neat package contained within one part of an organisation, and in this case, just examine performance management and nothing else.

The project offered a rare opportunity to examine a system which had not been closely questioned for three decades. It also provided an opportunity to challenge people’s thinking about what worked, what didn’t and what could be done to improve the group’s performance.

Given the nature of work undertaken by the project group, internal and external drivers and pressures, continual change and dealing with uncertainty, reactions to the project were a critical component of the learning journey. Some of the initial thinking and questions this raised were: Would the project group value participating in something new? Would they feel empowered by the process? Would they be able to see that in the long-run it would be useful to think about doing something differently? Do busy people want another facilitator [who probably represented more change] to come in to help them do work in terms of performance management?

THE OVERALL METHODOLOGY

The dissertation starts by discussing philosophical and environmental factors in order to understand paradigms and enculturation practices operating in organisations. The dominant paradigm within the public sector is also discussed.

The dilemmas contained within research paradigms and approaches are explored as well as the debates underpinning positivist and constructivist research. In this intervention an action learning / action research approach was used which is based on a constructivist philosophy. In using this approach a methodology was developed that could produce useful outcomes for the project group, the organisation and for the researcher. It is acknowledged that a constructivist approach was chosen even though it is at odds with the public
sector environment. Principles and practices of action research and grounded theory are explored to the extent it aided in the design of the project. Mind mapping was used to help the process of synthesizing large amounts of data.

Participation to create ownership was a critical part of this project as was the creation of appropriate questions to aid in change and learning. The process attempted to be explicit by holding group discussions about possible tensions due to the nature and influence of different worldviews. Roles, rules, responsibilities expectations and general group dynamics needed to be explicit during the process. Awareness and understanding developed iteratively for the researcher and the group. The process was at times contradictory in nature for the researcher. Critical friends and mentors aided the researcher and validated strategies to be used during the research project.

It is acknowledged that outcomes from the research are not necessarily ‘true’ for everyone. Elements within each research paradigm may be able to be mixed to broaden and represent more than one worldview and to some extent integrate the subjective and objective approaches. Emphasis was placed on process management, the development of theory and how it may contribute to learning in terms of change. The success or otherwise of the project was seen as a secondary issue.

Improved performance is a crucial ingredient for many groups in large organisations. Chief Executives regularly change and if groups are perceived as underperforming then they can be exposed to more reviews and restructures. The question becomes one of whether groups understand this cycle and then whether they want to manage change and performance improvement in a different way. Short-term solutions and quick-fix responses from external consultants may not always aid groups in the longer term. The process used in this project may produce useful theoretical insights and theory that applies more broadly to this organisation and possibly helps others in the public sector.
CHAPTER 2

PHILOSOPHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS
INTRODUCTION

Organisations face a multitude of problems. Understanding how ontological and epistemological assumptions influence our behaviour may help us to address some of these problems. Ontological and epistemological assumptions are also key ingredients of our paradigms or patterns. The discussion highlights the need to understand an organisation’s culture, how it learns and the difficulties in changing patterns that exist deep within us. Having a heightened awareness of cultural practices, possible dysfunctional systems and difficulties with communication may aid in the selection of an appropriate research methodology.
Understanding terms like ontology and epistemology as a researcher are vital because it helps us to understand problems in organisations and problems within ourselves in terms of the part we play in organisational life. It also allows us to begin to appreciate how knowledge is understood and built and the different paradigms that exist in organisational practice and research.

Understanding our ontological and epistemological positions allow us to realise that research has philosophical foundations that influence the way in which we think about the world. We are also exposed and begin to appreciate the ontological differences between researchers as well as the different ways people operate in organisations and why they may choose to operate in that way.

Burrell and Morgan confirm that we need to understand:

What is fundamental in determining the way in which we see the world which we are purporting to analyse [1979:xiii].

A fledgling researcher could then:

- understand and identify different methodological paradigms
- decide which methodology to select for the problem being researched; and
- importantly, make an informed decision about selecting a methodology that suits the research project the best.

Definitions

Burrell and Morgan explain that:

assumptions of an ontological nature …..are faced with a basic ontological question: whether the ‘reality’ to be investigated is external to the individual – imposing itself on individual consciousness from without – or the product of individual consciousness; whether ‘reality’ is of an ‘objective’ nature, or the product of individual cognition; whether ‘reality’ is a given ‘out there’ in the world, or the product of one’s mind [1979:1].

Of equal importance is an understanding of epistemology and the assumptions surrounding epistemology. Burrell and Morgan [1979:1] say that epistemology is
about “…the grounds of knowledge – about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings”.

The following diagram is a representation of the Platonic view of knowledge which is at the core of epistemology [Steup 2006]:

![The Meaning of Epistemology](image)

Figure 1 [Steup 2006]

Bawden [1998:41] succinctly summarises these terms by explaining that:

**Ontology** refers to assumptions about the nature of nature, while **epistemology** refers to assumptions about the nature of knowing [about nature]. Both are key elements of paradigms.

The definitions then beg the question: how does this impact on research methodology?

**Ontological & Epistemological Research Questions**

In terms of research, Guba and Lincoln [1994] believe there are a series of questions that “reflects a logical….primacy”. They say that two ontological questions that are important for us to answer are:

- What assumptions are being made about the form and nature of the world of ‘things’ and experience? and
- What is our reality?

Then in terms of epistemology the question becomes:

- What is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known?

The methodological question then becomes:
How can the researcher find out whatever he or she believes can be known? [1994:108]

None of the questions can be answered in isolation. Each question is connected and remains linked because one influences the other.

Coghlan and Casey [2001:678] confirm that understanding ontological and epistemological paradigms allow us to “…see the role history and experience has played in organisations and how it continually influences perceptions, behaviour and assumptions.”

Ontological and epistemological paradigms are therefore used to describe assumptions about the grounds of knowledge. Our deep assumptions about knowledge go to the core of organisations because they determine how we understand the world. Such assumptions also powerfully influence how we choose to communicate with each other.

Our understanding and communication methods flow on to the effectiveness of relationships and this effectiveness may often depend on our ability to understand each other and to be truthful with each other. Scott [2002:47] says “You have to get at ground truth before you can turn anything around”. This view seems to apply to work life, home life and any meaningful relationship. What flows from this dialogue then are a series of questions:

- Is it possible to generate trust relatively quickly in a research group so honest and open feedback can be exchanged?
- To what extent does trust impact on the outcome of research?
- Is there a link between trust and truth?
- What is truth? How do we measure truth? Who owns the truth? Is my truth better than other’s truth? What is real?

Scott [2002:31] believes that “…your version of reality is as good as anybody’s”….and that we need to bear in mind that “…reality can never be absolute and that it isn’t something that is handed to us”. Scott [2002:95] also suggests that organisations fail when there is dissonance between ‘ground truth’ and ‘official truth’. She says that if organisations are to survive and enhance relationships they need to:
In exploring the notion of truth and ‘interrogating reality’ perhaps organisations may see with fresh eyes the possible areas of workplace dysfunction. Scott seems to suggest that our understanding and learning increases by having tough discussions about issues that are usually considered off-limits. She also suggests that the longer we do not have the discussion the greater the dysfunction may become.

You cannot discuss ontological and epistemological assumptions without raising paradigms as each powerfully influences the other. As Bawden [1998:41] states both are key elements of paradigms.

The following section explores paradigms and paradigmatic shifts and what is currently operating in bureaucracies and why this is an extension of the ontological and epistemological discussion.

PARADIGMS & LINKS TO ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE & ENCULTURATION PROCESSES

Paradigm Definitions

Albrecht says that:

A paradigm is a mental frame of reference that dominates the way people think and act…[and that paradigms]… operate below the level of conscious thought and tend to dominate a person’s thinking without his or her direct awareness. [1992:45]

Paradigms will usually only make themselves felt when something or someone violates or contradicts them. Because a paradigm sits below the level of conscious thought, it is essential to emphasise that we are often not aware of our thinking and even when we are aware it does not mean that we can or want to change the thinking or the behaviour – it is not an automatic or mechanistic process!
It is important to re-emphasise this point. Bawden gives us an insight into the difficulties we may experience in trying to change our paradigms. He says that:

if we are to change the way we do things in the world about us, we first need to change the way we see things: if we always see how we've always seen, then we'll always be who we've always been! [1998:39]

Bawden [1998:39] confirms that we need to acknowledge that often we are repeating patterns within paradigms that are potentially unhealthy and we should fear this paralysis and seek out a paradigm shift. He acknowledges that this is no mean feat and cites Thomas Kuhn [1969] as defining paradigms as “entire constellations of beliefs, values and techniques”. The movie *Groundhog Day* shows how we continually repeat patterns until we learn to do things differently – if only it was so easy!

If we agree that our beliefs, values and ways of doing things lie comfortably settled within us, so deep in fact that they are carried out in an unconscious manner, automatically without thought of what is being done or said – then what are the chances that they can be changed? The dilemma seems to be to become aware of our beliefs, values and behaviours and at the same time somehow see what others see in us and decide if we want to or need to change!

Bawden [1998:39] acknowledges that any shift from a paradigm which prevails within an organisation:

…is akin to a revolution; for it is the paradigm which defines the culture of the organisation, or the organisation itself for that matter. [1998:39]

Chalmers [1976:107] cites Kuhn as agreeing with this view by describing Kuhn’s open-ended continuum of paradigm shifts as:

*pre-science – normal science – crisis – revolution – normal science – new crisis*

Willmott [1993:688] reminds us that there needs to be a struggle for a new paradigm to emerge because “…new paradigms do not parachute in from the skies.”!
Where does a Paradigm come from?

So what exactly is a paradigm and where does it come from and how do they shift? Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe [1991:23] explain that the term became popular as a result of the work of Thomas Kuhn. They say that:

Kuhn [1962] used it to describe the progress of scientific discoveries in practice, rather than how they are subsequently reconstructed within textbooks and academic journals. [1991:24]

Summarised, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe explain that:

...science progresses in tiny steps, which refine and extend what is already ‘known’….but occasionally experiments start to produce results that do not fit into existing theories and patterns. [1991:24]

The process of producing different results is described as coming from “independent and creative thinking which goes outside the boundaries of existing ideas” and which result in “a scientific revolution” that provides new theories and a new paradigm. New paradigms facilitate people to “alter radically the way [they] see the world”. [1991:24]

In explaining the nature of paradigms, Guba and Lincoln [1994:107] seem to indicate that such a revolution would of necessity need to be fairly far-reaching if it will cause people to think and do things differently because it goes to the very heart of a person’s worldview and who they are. In challenging a paradigm you challenge the very basis of their beliefs and truths.

In some quarters new paradigms may cause enthusiasm; in other quarters it seems to have set up major theoretical debate in terms of ‘paradigm wars’. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe [1991:24] mention that new paradigms also allow new ways of doing research such as naturalistic inquiry, social constructionism, qualitative methodology and cooperative inquiry.

Being aware of different paradigms and paradigm shifts allow us to know how organisations go about their business and how they think, what they do and what
they really value! Often this is where we will see a difference between “what we say and what we do” in organisations or “espoused theories and theories in use” [Argyris and Schon in Dick and Dalmau 2004:9].

**Espoused Theories and Theories in Use**

To illustrate what “espoused theories and theories in use” actually means for each of us Argyris and Schon [in Dick and Dalmau 2004] state that:

- There is a gap between what we think we believe, and the values implied by our behaviour
- We are blind to this gap
- Though others may perceive it, they are reluctant to admit that they have, let alone bring it to our attention
- If they do, we are likely to react most defensively. [2004:10]

Inconsistency between “what we say and what we do” is an area of dissonance where a whole series of negative emotional responses such as cynicism and passive-aggressiveness may develop between people and organisations [Neilson, Pasternack, Van Nuys 2005:2-3]. Such insights help us to recognize the culture of an organisation and often can be applied in understanding an individual’s and organisation’s paradigm as well as our own!

Appreciating different paradigms and what it takes to experience a paradigm shift also allow us to comprehend why defence mechanisms and resistance are part of organisational life. This understanding has the potential to help us deal with these behaviours and perhaps limit our own personal reactions and corresponding unhealthy behaviours [Neilson, Pasternack, Van Nuys 2005:8].

**Adopting Double Loop Learning**

To aid us in understanding our reactions and to do things differently, Argyris and Schon [in Dick and Dalmau 2004] suggest adopting a double-loop rather than a single-loop learning cycle. Argyris says:
In single-loop learning, we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing values. In double-loop learning, we learn to change the field of constancy itself [2004:18].

Argyris [in Smith and Hitt 2005] explains that single and double-loop learning is a process about managerial and organisational learning. He describes the process in terms of detecting and correcting errors either by single-loop learning which does not need governing values altered. Double-loop learning means we need to examine governing values within 'master programs' and change these values. Argyris [in Smith and Hitt 2005:262] says that 'the master programs are the basis for the routines that make organizational life manageable'. Changing governing values which are usually held deep within us will not necessarily come easily because it means changing our need to:

- Control everything
- Maximize winning and minimize losing
- Suppress negative feelings and
- Display rational behaviour [2005:264].

Dennard [1996:495] points out that new paradigms allow us to “….re-examine some basic assumptions about the nature of government”. She acknowledges that this may create some dissonance within us particularly if we are unconsciously locked into a set pattern. A convincing example of dissonance between people and organisations is provided by Argyris [in Smith and Hitt 2005:261] who state that organisations have defensive patterns that play themselves out as follows:
This repetitive pattern leads to people often feeling like victims: helpless and inhibited to suggest or identify that routines need to change because they are dysfunctional. Argyris [in Smith and Hitt 2005:262] believe that the problem is compounded because organisations have a defensive reasoning mindset and the above pattern places pressure on everyone not to change! What this seems to indicate is the existence of internal pressure within individuals [because they feel like a victim and cannot speak up for themselves] and the existence of external pressure being applied by the organisation resisting any possible suggestions to change. Such routines feed back over and over again which has a reinforcing mechanism on people within the organisation.

**Questioning Ontological & Epistemological Paradigms**

From the above discussion it can be seen that our ontological and epistemological assumptions are about our reality, the grounds of our knowledge and how we understand the world and communicate it to others. An event may present us with an opportunity to look at and question our truth, our beliefs and
knowledge. Questioning our long held views and behaviours could be likened to a revolution particularly if it questions how an organisation is perpetuating negative defensive routines. Understanding how we go about justifying such truth/belief to others is the beginning of the journey.

Carlopio [1998:16] explains that occasions that lead us to question the very essence of who we are, as previously mentioned, do not often sit comfortably with us. It is usually an event that can be quite traumatic or a major change in the work environment that presents us with an opportunity to struggle within ourselves. Within that moment there may be presented to us a chance to change and the possibility of learning …but this is not a sequential or automatic thing. Sometimes the learning may take a number of events before it is internalised and real change takes place. Or we may become defensive and there will be no change at all. Carlopio [1998:16] describes this as an adjustment process. He explains the different stages and likens the different steps to a grieving process.

Dennard [1996:496] asks us to question our paradigms. She says “What if the boundaries placed between things, organisations, people and countries are only mental constructs, not hard and fast reality?” She suggests that if we change how we think and broaden our worldview, then internal and external attitudes, behaviours and relationships can also change. If we broaden the way we think we may then be in a position to see another’s point of view and include this different way of thinking and / or compromise in decision-making.

This presupposes that we want to be open-minded in this way! If we accept that no-one is value-free and we process what is happening within us and our external environment in a self-serving way, we will find a way to explain things away and not challenge our own paradigms/patterns. This is not a deliberate conscious process, this happens internally at a very deep level within us.

The significant point here is that people make up organisations and as Carlopio [1998:12] says, “organisations do not change, people do” it questions the potential of changing people in organisations.
Organisations are places that keep on reaffirming paradigms or patterns, ways of thinking and being. They are places in which we defend the way we always do things, our interests, our roles and our lifestyles within our work environment [Neilson, Pasternack, Van Nuys 2005:8]. Such things impact on research, research design and the outcomes we might be able to achieve with a group. Outcomes will probably depend on the extent of the group’s willingness to change and do things differently [Carlopio 1998:12]. An organisation’s enculturation practices may also impact on research outcomes.

ENCULTURATION PRACTICES AND RESEARCH

Argyris [in Smith and Hitt 2005:277] points out that one way of ‘seeing’ an organisation is to acknowledge that “…there are managerial components that are above ground and underground”. Anything that is above ground is open, transparent and can be discussed. He says that anything underground “…is dominated by defensive reasoning where the objective is to protect the players from embarrassment or threat”. [2005:277]

If the goal is to protect an organisation at all cost the question this raises is: Will a researcher be able to identify areas of gap or limitations if there is a defensive routine operating? Does this mean that the deeper a researcher delves, the less likely they will be able to identify dysfunctional patterns because of the cover-up?

The figure below attempts to demonstrate pictorially the above ground and underground managerial issues that exist. Hence, the more questions that are asked the more a researcher may ultimately come up against resistance on a variety of levels in a variety of ways.
Enculturation & Fragmentation

Dennard [1996:495] gives us some understanding into how *The Paradigm of Fragmentation* plays itself out in organisations by stressing that we:

…constantly compete with one another for limited resources… and that…we have nothing in common but our fear of each other.

Moreover, Dennard [1996:495] explains that enculturation has assisted organisations to control conflict and maintain social stability by “….keeping people within the hedges” and for public sector employees this has meant “…reducing life processes and individuality to easily manageable classes, categories, problems and behaviours, and the procedures meant to regulate them”… and thus produce “…a sense of social order that is not unified but fragmented for the sake of predictability”.

Dennard (1996:496) helps us to realise that our current paradigm needs reconsideration. At the same time she admits the difficulty of reconsidering our paradigm because it will “…undermine many traditional administrators’ deep
sense of social responsibility for controlling outcomes”. In real terms she says this means managers need to:

- stop defending narrow interests, roles and lifestyles;
- be more reflective and less adversarial about their relationships to their environment and others;
- stop seeing self-organization and interdependence as chaotic or out of control;
- see that both diversity and complexity represent living systems; and
- be inclusive because it creates life forms and structures that sustain their own diversity as well as others. [1996:496]

Such a radical proposition forces a manager to question his/her paradigm - namely to give up the ability to control organisational reality and to look within as to why they have “…limited tolerance of ambiguity”….and hold a deep ingrained belief that “…individuals must be categorized, treated with conformity, and made to comply” [Dennard, 1996:496]. At the same time, we need to accept that “it is human nature to prefer, to seek out, and even to expect certainty” [Tetenbaum, 1998:23].

We are also told by Dennard [1996:496] that if the warnings are not heeded that we are:

waging war against ourselves and fragmenting our relationships in a manner that makes us adversaries rather than co-creators of our environments.

Neilson, Pasternack, Van Nuys [2005:3] agree with Dennard to the extent that resistance has become so entrenched in large organisations that we are chronically failing to deliver on commitments.

In Dennard’s view [1996:497] much of the problem in creating this paradigm within individuals is that managers have been trained to believe that change is difficult. Many problems have arisen through this belief. Carlopio [1998:14] asserts we cannot “…get upset with people who do not seem to want to learn or change…because…they are being normal human beings.”

**Enculturation Practices**

Through enculturation practices of reward and punishment we learn very quickly what is and isn’t acceptable. Enculturation applies during the development of an individual from infancy upwards. It starts at birth, is reinforced during school and
continues in our work environments. Examples of paradigm peculiarities and enculturation practices are discussed below:

- Neilson, Pasternack and Van Nuys [2005:3] affirm that unhealthy organisations are over-managed and that “its multiple layers of management create analysis paralysis and also politicize decision-making”. They also draw attention to the level of control being high in passive-aggressive organisations and that:

  misunderstandings and misrepresentations concerning who really has control over which decisions are often the first signs that an organisation is slipping into passive-aggressive territory [2005:6].

- Dennard [1996] continually reinforces the message of the Paradigm of Fragmentation and that we are becoming out of touch with what is happening within our organisations. She believes that Western culture is suffering from ‘original trauma’ caused by the systematic removal of our lives from nature, and the life force itself. She says some of the physical symptoms generated within people are: hyper-reactions, inappropriate outbursts of anger, psychic numbing, constriction of emotions and a loss of sense of control in our workplace.

- Karpin [1995] discusses the importance of reforming management education and claims that:

  despite the nation’s considerable investment in the provision of management education, Task Force consultations and research led to concerns as to whether the sector is adequately addressing: education for the new paradigm of management i.e. the increasing importance of ‘soft skills’; internationalisation; cross-functional integration; diversity, links to industry and enterprises; and delivering world class programs. [1995:298]

- Tetenbaum [1998] cites Tom Peters as observing that we’ve spent the past 40 years:

  …teaching people to create order out of chaos, but would have to spend the next 10 years teaching people to create chaos out of order. In fact, we have spent so much time teaching organizations to be systematized and orderly that now they can’t respond to the fast-changing environment [1998:23-24].

Uninventive workplaces which stifle critical analysis and suppress different views encourage workers to limit their participation [Neilson, Pasternack and Van Nuys
What is created then is a workforce that follow orders and has a “...reliance upon procedures and rules” [Argyris and Schon in Dick and Dalmau 2004:16].

**The Standardisation of Work**

It seems that if we all receive the same programming through enculturation, it is likely that we will all share the same beliefs and expectations. This is a strong motivator for governments to standardize work in organisations and make education compulsory. Deciding what will be taught and how it will be taught is a powerful political tool for controlling people [Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe 1991:43].

However, there are some individuals who do not conform to culturally defined standards because they may have been “abnormally” programmed resulting in the non-acceptance of the norms of that society. These people are often defined by groups that they belong to as being deviant or even mentally ill and are often known to be ostracised in organisations for their different thinking and ways of doing [Argyris and Schon in Dick and Dalmau 2004:9]. Essentially, this seems to be a form of enculturation, that is, you must be part of the accepted group or you will probably be out on your own!

Tetenbaum (1998:28) strongly suggests that if organisations want to capitalize on original thinking ‘mavericks’ should be part of the workforce. It is acknowledged however that often they leave organisations feeling extremely frustrated or just stop participating in the workplace.

Organisations, of course, also use other softer mechanisms for enculturation including induction/orientation programs that subtly outline the rules and regulations operating in the organisation. Then there are the unspoken rules which need to be picked-up very quickly by individuals if they are to survive organisational life [Argyris and Schon in Dick and Dalmau 2004:16].

What seems clear is over time systems and ways of doing things become the norm to the extent that very few challenge the rules. Notably, Willmott [1993:694] in a study undertaken in 1985 was able to confirm that “…workers became
preoccupied with preserving their rules” and that they valued participation in shopfloor games as a means of gaining “…an enhanced sense of choice in, and control over, the organisation of their work.”

Dennard [1996:498] reminds us that institutionalised behaviour or enculturation means that there is:

- A strong imperative to control reality
- Limited tolerance of ambiguity
- An ingrained belief that individuals must be categorized and treated with conformity; and
- A focus on complying with rules and regulations.

In such an environment it is unclear whether there would be any room for creativity or innovation or the acceptance of difference and diversity. It is also unclear whether an organisation would value, reward or encourage humility and ignorance as a process of consultation and/or research [Schein 1988:11].

Argyris and Schon [in Dick and Dalmau 2004:9] believe that organisations are places of systemic enculturation and declare that:

- We learn a complex set of social rules that we use fairly consistently but often find hard to express explicitly.
- The wider culture in the developed world is in many respects autocratic and rational in the narrow sense of the term.
- Substantial change [for example through double-loop learning] happens rarely and slowly [2004:9].

Argyris and Schon [in Dick and Dalmau 2004:16] also support the view that bureaucracies are institutionalised and that there is a “right behaviour” and fixed solutions are taught for tasks and relationships.

Ultimately, Corbin and Strauss [2008:95] acknowledge that a researcher must take into account the culture of the organisation when conducting research in terms of “its own purpose, structure, rules, problems, histories, relationships, spatial features and so forth.”
In understanding an organisation’s dominant paradigm its culture will probably be much easier to identify.

**THE DOMINANT PARADIGM OPERATING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

The organisation and enculturation discussion above unfortunately does not paint a very healthy or positive work life picture. The conclusion that seems to rise to the surface is that many bureaucracies are dysfunctional and that command and control mechanisms are perpetuated with unclear outcomes. In short what bureaucracies seem to reward, accept or turn a blind eye to include, but are not limited by:

- Adversarial management styles that defend narrow interests and roles [Dennard 1996]
- Over-managed staff creating analysis paralysis and politicized decision-making [Neilson, Pasternack and Van Nuys 2005]
- Management that values control and display limited tolerance for ambiguity [Dennard 1996]
- Staff who do just enough work to stay out of trouble and who exhibit passive-resistance behaviours which limit the ability of organisations to deliver on commitments [Neilson, Pasternack and Van Nuys 2005]
- Staff who are categorized, treated with conformity and made to comply to standard rules and regulations [Dennard 1996].

The synchronization of these views seems to indicate that the paradigm operating in large bureaucracies is positivist, that is, “…epistemologies which seek to explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements” [Burrell & Morgan 1979:5]. Dennard [1996:496] says we need to reconsider our current positivist paradigm. She admits the difficulty of advocating this position because of our learned way of wanting to constantly control everything. Willmott [1993:689] agrees and says that:
...many deep-rooted features of organisational life – inequality, conflict, domination and subordination and manipulation – are written out of the script (of functionalism) in favour of behavioural questions associated with efficiency or motivation [1993:689].

Concurrently, the discussion by Argyris and Schon [in Dick and Dalmau 2004:26] identifies that most systems in organisations encourage Model 1 values which are characterised by adversarial, competitive and narrowly rational held behaviours. These values seem to fall within a positivist paradigm.

At an international workshop in Dhaka, Reason [2004:1] confirmed that there is a dominance of positivist and reductionist ways of working in organisations. He extended his argument by linking the reductionist and controlling mechanisms in organisations into the field of how policies are created. In this way he was able to demonstrate that positivist ways of working are not just impacting within organisations but globally in how we deal with issues of poverty and sustainability.

This view is further confirmed by Bawden [1998:39] who says there is a:

...growing recognition that the positivist paradigm which does prevail in so many organisations and societies and indeed nations, is inadequate in the face of contemporary challenges.

However, we still need to bear in mind that it is very difficult to be critical of a paradigm from within and to examine more closely what is central to a paradigm shift.

From Newtonian Science [linear] to Complexity [non-linear]

Much of the discussion so far has philosophical roots because it is essential to source where our perceptions come from: our assumptions, what we value, our reality and how we make sense of the world.

Many writers in the discussion above give an indication of how deep our values, perceptions and assumptions lie within us and where our behaviour comes from.
The writers identify the need for change in our organisations and the difficulty in trying to create such change and new learning.

If Dennard [1996:495] is correct about her assertion that:

- it is paramount for us to control and to impose order in organisations; and
- Newtonian physics supports her theory which sees the universe as a play where things push and pull each other around...[1996:495]

is it going to be possible to expect a group in a public sector organisation to welcome change and be open minded enough for new learning?

To undertake research appropriately, Coghlan and Brannick [2005:120] confirm that a researcher needs to:

...draw on knowledge of how change and learning take place ...not only for individuals but also to groups, between groups and to organisations.

**An Adversarial View of Life?**

Many social scientists have confirmed that a Newtonian, adversarial view of life is replicated in the workplace. Dennard [1996:495] says this is the Darwinian world view:

...whose perspective on evolution confirmed that life is indeed a dreary battle for domination among stronger and weaker life forms.

Given that a Newtonian/Darwinian way of viewing the world has been around for decades, such assumptions are deeply and unconsciously held within us. This worldview has significant flow-on effects on our life at work.

If there is a belief and a need to control, compete and to dominate, to impose order on everything we do and the way we do it, this may influence many levels in a bureaucracy. If we feel uncomfortable with challenging the status quo, with people who are different to us who have differing views which we cannot control, this again influences each of us and the behaviours we choose to use and how we choose to continue to work together. We need to question however if we
want to be in continual competition and domination? Change comes when we start to look at:

- How people, systems and structures are/are not working together and how change is/is not implemented;
- Cultural aspects, behaviours and choices we make as individuals and organisationally; and
- How the organisation subtly sends out messages as to what it values in terms of behaviours, power, control and rewards and punishment [Neilson, Pasternack and Van Nuys 2005].

Tetenbaum [1998:23] and Carlpio [1998:13] remind us that it is “…human nature to prefer, to seek out, and even to expect certainty”. It is important to acknowledge that if all we have known is Newtonian/Darwinian ways of doing, being and seeing then we will not want to change – as with any other ‘pattern’ or paradigm or ways of doing!

Nevertheless, Dennard [1996:497] says “it is possible to change lives by listening, empathizing, and caring.” If, however, these are values that are not important or deemed not to benefit the organisation in some tangible way, why would anyone endorse such an approach?

**The Effect of Our Paradigms in the Workplace**

To extend this thinking we could personalise the discussion in terms of how individuals are rewarded and punished in workplaces. If the system demonstrably rewards success on the basis of a competitive and adversarial management style, with high levels of control exercised over people and survival depending on maximising resources – why would managers want to do anything differently?

Equally, the question then becomes: Is it realistic to expect that such a manager would want to give up power, control and dominance if they thought that their survival and a higher pay packet would be jeopardised? It seems in such
circumstances perpetuating power, control and survival behaviours would be the overriding driver or motivator. Given that the organisation is reinforcing and validating and rewarding control behaviours, managers will want to continue to cling and repeat the pattern.

Dennard [1996:497] suggests that problems of management are not necessarily methodological but rather ontological. This means that it is not about managing better, it is about questioning the basic logic of our assumptions and understandings about our relationships with one another.

Hock [1998] substantiates the view that institutions are:

...increasingly unable to achieve the purpose for which they were created, yet, continue to exist as they progressively devour resources, demean people and destroy the environment.

Bawden [1998:39] also substantiates this view and says:

...it is as if, paradoxically, we humans are currently under the influence of a paradigm which denies our very humanness [1998:39].

The issue of humanity is extremely important if we want to change organisations. Ferrini [1994:111] agrees and says that:

...the cause of all human conflict is a simple one: each side dehumanizes the other. Each side sees the other as less worthy. As long as each side perceives the other this way, even the simplest detail cannot be negotiated [1994:111].

Hock [1998] thirty years ago asked himself three questions which are still significant, relevant and compelling today. These questions are:

1. Why are organisations everywhere whether political, commercial, or social increasingly unable to manage their affairs?
2. Why are individuals, everywhere increasingly in conflict with and alienated from the organisations of which they are a part?
3. Why are government, society and the biosphere increasingly in disarray? [1998]
If we continue to remain in a Newtonian/Darwinian pattern, Argyris and Schon [in Dick and Dalmau 2004:17] believe that people will continue to use competitive and adversarial methods when they feel at risk. They go on to point out that:

In many organisations and other social systems you don’t get better resources by being honest. You do better by telling selective truths or, if you can get away with it, plausible lies.

Even more disturbing is their view that:

People are encouraged to present information selectively. Those who are honest risk being treated as deviants [2004:17].

The key concepts contained in a Newtonian/Darwinian existence are outlined in the figure below.

Figure 4 - Source: Tetenbaum [1998], Dennard [1996], Stacey [1996], Hock [1998] and Wheatley [2003].
Focussing on the Issue of Complexity

Do we want to perpetuate Newtonian attitudes, beliefs and values in our organisations and consequential behaviours that manifest between people? Or is there a different / better way of working with one another?

Figure 4 attempts to show that most things are achieved through competition in a mechanistic paradigm. Competitive systems play themselves out in organisations through struggles over limited resources, selection, recruitment, retention and performance systems that produce dubious results and survival of political agendas. There is a command and control structure operating and success is measured in terms of maintaining a stable system. In times of crisis or instability, a leader will re-establish equilibrium. Leaders retreat and envision the future and develop a strategic plan. Order is imposed from above with top-down command and control leadership - Tetenbaum [1998], Dennard [1996], Stacey [1996], Hock [1998] & Wheatley [2003].

Managers support this culture by encouraging regularity and efficiency through structures, rules, procedures and power. In this way, the environment and future maintain their predictability. Structures are designed to support decision-makers and people are taught to create order out of chaos. The notion of Nicol’s [2000] “…if it’s predictable its manageable “ becomes questionable in an environment of constant change being experienced by people in organisations.

On the other hand the key concepts contained in a complexity system are outlined in Figure 5 below.
Even though the environment is uncertain and cannot be controlled, life is a recognisable pattern within infinite diversity. All people within the organisation are encouraged to be leaders. Relationships are non-linear, made up of interconnections and branching choices that produce unintended consequences and render things unpredictable. Order emerges by itself in a self-organising way. Structures evolve as needed and patterns of behaviour unfold in irregular but similar forms - Tetenbaum [1998], Dennard [1996], Stacey [1996], Hock [1998] & Wheatley [2003].

A final observation that can be made here is that there is no quick fix or immediate ability to adopt a complexity paradigm. Application requires managers “…to change the basic ontological structure of their management philosophy”
[Dennard 1996:499]. This will take time and a change that has to come from the top of the organisation as well as an ability to generate champions within it.

It is also important to acknowledge that a complexity approach is possibly not always the answer for all organisations. Blunt [1997:345] argues that often non-Western cultural values are quite different from those found in western countries and that “discussing the undiscussables” can also “…engender some resistance from employees and managers who feel that they are being put unfairly at personal risk”.

To further confirm this argument, Blunt [1997:343] cites Hofstede’s research which has identified the different cultural environments and responses to leadership, motivation, job satisfaction and that “…openness, frankness, lack of hierarchy and so on are not universal pre-conditions for organisational success.”

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

The discussion attempts to explain terms like ontology and epistemology to begin to understand how knowledge is understood and where it comes from. In this way we begin to understand different:

- worldviews;
- styles of communication;
- paradigms and the repetition of patterns; and
- the philosophical foundations that influence the way in which we think, be and do every day in our worlds.

Appreciating an organisation’s ontological and epistemological stance also allows insights into what is valued and not to assume that an organisation wants its people to broaden their lens or that an organisation would necessarily value diversity.
Exploring the notion of paradigms demonstrates how we constantly repeat patterns that are fundamental and integral to us. Often we are unaware of our patterns and even when we are aware we are very reluctant and resistant to change.

We need to increase awareness about ontology, epistemology and paradigms and how they connect and impact on individuals in organisations. People are often unconsciously defending the way they have always done things. Maintaining our interests, roles, lifestyles, work environment and status quo is often paramount and determines our behaviour to what is happening around us.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH PARADIGMS, APPROACHES AND DILEMMAS
**Chapter 3:**

- Identifies the four main research paradigms and the selection of a research approach.

- Discusses the diverse ontological and epistemological assumptions between researchers, common methodologies and processes used.

- Raises the issue of research dilemmas if a researcher has a constructivist predisposition in a positivist environment.

- Explains why a constructivist approach was used even though it may seem at odds with a public sector environment.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter explains terms such as ontology and epistemology. It outlines differences in worldviews, styles of communication, paradigms and the repetition of patterns. The earlier discussion also gives some insight into the way we think, the way we structure our workplaces and how we construct our knowledge of the world through our beliefs, assumptions and ‘truths’. This chapter is primarily concerned with how we enquire into our world. It identifies the four main research paradigms and the selection of a research approach. It builds on the diversity of ontological and epistemological assumptions within individuals and explores this in research terms. The chapter explains why a constructivist approach was used even though it may seem at odds within a public sector cultural environment.
THE MAIN RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Burrell & Morgan [1979:23] describe four paradigms and a network of assumptions in understanding the way individuals interpret the world and how such assumptions have direct implications for the selection of methodologies. The four paradigms are functionalist, radical structuralist, interpretive and radical humanist. Burrell and Morgan [1979:23] state that:

…each paradigm must be viewed separately because the differentiation is of sufficient importance to warrant treatment of the paradigms as four distinct entities.

The four paradigms sit within a subjective-objective and regulatory-radical change dimensions which also explores issues of commensurability and incommensurability. The philosophy underpinning the four paradigms stressed by Burrell & Morgan is that each of the four paradigms has its own research methodology and each research methodology cannot talk or hear one another because the assumptions of one paradigm defy the assumptions of all others [1979:25].

Considerable criticism and angst has been directed toward Burrell and Morgan’s [1979:35] analytical schema of four paradigms. Guba and Lincoln [1994:116] consider the ‘paradigm wars’ articulated by many authors as over-exaggerated. They believe that describing the discussions and altercations of the past two decades as ‘wars’ paints the matter as more confrontational than necessary. They suggest that a resolution of paradigm differences will occur only when a new paradigm emerges that is more sophisticated than any existing one. A new paradigm is most likely to occur only if supporters of the different points of view come together to discuss and not argue the sanctity of their views. They contend that continuing dialogue among paradigm advocates of all descriptions will provide the best way of moving forward. Whether this is possible is probably debatable!

Fundamentally the two competing views on the nature of ‘reality’ which underpin the philosophical debate in the social sciences is **positivist** and **constructivist**
[Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe 1991:21]. They also suggest that “arguments, criticisms and debates are central to the progress of philosophy”. They believe that many of the hotly contested debates have been on the basis of comparing “…the ‘pure’ versions of each paradigm” and that the differences between research methods and techniques “…are by no means so clear cut and distinct.” [1991:26]. In their view, to consider one paradigm more superior than the other is perhaps questionable.

Issues of Validity between Research Paradigms

Reason [1988] states that to deny there has been a paradigm shift or new approach to participatory research is “sterile and useless”. He claims it’s part of a new world-view that:

… is emerging through systems thinking, ecological concerns and awareness, feminism, education, as well as in the philosophy of human inquiry.” [1988:3]

He cites Heron [1971, 1981a] as confirming that:

…orthodox research methods are inadequate for a science of persons, quite simply because they undermine the self-determination of their ‘subjects’.

People who reject that there has been a paradigm shift from orthodox research methods to human inquiry are usually “…working as scientists in a traditional mode, or who have been educated within a scientific profession.” [Reason 1988:13]. He goes on to stress that orthodox research has contributed to:

…the impoverishment of our world and to the quite frightening consequences of the mechanical world-view which treats all living beings as things to be manipulated and exploited [1988:4].

Greenwood and Levin [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:92] agree to the extent that they say:

Social research aimed at social improvement is not an inferior counterpart of “pure” social research….and …action research is the form social research must take if it is to achieve valid results [and] bring about useful social change..[2000:92]
One of the main contentions made by Greenwood and Levin [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:94] is that anyone or anything that challenges powerful systems and structures and suggests a different approach or is perceived as shifting the ‘power’ balance is considered ‘…notoriously difficult to change’: They go on to claim that:

…action research is not some kind of a social science dead end. It is a disciplined way of developing valid knowledge and theory while promoting positive social change. [2000:98].

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:20] agree with this view and state:

Action research is a form of science, which differs from the model of experimental physics, but is genuinely scientific in its emphasis on careful observation and study of the effects of behaviour on human systems as their members manage change.

They also confirm that:

Action research as a scientific approach does not have to justify itself in comparison to other approaches, but rather is evaluated within its own frame of reference [2005:8].

**LOCATING ACTION RESEARCH WITHIN THE PARADIGMS**

If nothing else Burrell & Morgan [1979:35] provide an analytical schema that attempts to help in the exploration of social theory. Blunt [1986:37] confirms that the four paradigms “…..provide a useful framework for analysing the vast amount of research on organisations, and indicate what might be the most fruitful direction to take.”

Within the analytical schema the two paradigms that are compatible to action research are interpretive and radical humanist: as identified in the figure below:
To be explicit, the radical humanist and interpretive paradigms are in direct contrast to the radical structuralist and functionalist paradigms on the right hand side of the schema.

**Interpretive & Radical Humanist Paradigms**

**Interpretive Paradigm**

The interpretive paradigm is:

…informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action.

and

… the direct product of the German idealist tradition of social thought. Its foundations were laid in the work of Kant and reflect a social philosophy which emphasises the essentially spiritual nature of the social world. [Burrell and Morgan 1979:28 - 31]

This explanation immediately puts paid to the notion that the paradigm can sit comfortably with positivists because it is subjective rather than objective in nature.
Action research ancestry can particularly be seen in hermeneutics and existential phenomenology in that:

Hermeneutics is concerned with interpreting and understanding the products of the human mind which characterise the social and cultural world…and…in order to understand social or cultural phenomena, the observer must enter into a dialogue with the subject of study. [Burrell and Morgan 1979:236-7].

Existential Phenomenology – Schutz argues that consciousness is fundamentally an unbroken stream of lived experiences which have no meaning in themselves. Meaning is dependent upon reflexivity – the process of turning back on oneself and looking at what has been going on. Meaning is attached to actions retrospectively; only the already-experienced is meaningful, not that which is in the process of being experienced. [Burrell and Morgan 1979:244]

and

Genuine understanding means the intentional grasping of the experience of the other…[which] …is possible in face-to-face ‘we-relations’; it depends upon direct exchange and interaction. [Burrell and Morgan 1979:245]

What does this form of research assume? A researcher cannot be an objective detached observer, s/he must become part of the subject of study. In other words, the researcher has a desire to assist a group to achieve a useful outcome for the group, together, not as a separate entity. The process of assisting the group is obtained from reflection or ‘…turning back on oneself and looking at what has been going on…’. This is done in a manner of genuine understanding. This is a two-way process: the group and the researcher need to be reflexive together.

McNiff and Whitehead [2006:40] also describe this form of research as assuming that:

- Researchers observe people in their natural settings, and offer descriptions and explanations for what the people are doing.
- Analysis of data tends to be qualitative, in terms of meaning of behaviours.
- The people in the situations offer and negotiate their own understandings of their practices with the interpretations of external researchers, but it is still the external researcher’s story that goes into the public domain. [2006:40].

This discussion identifies that if a researcher chose to use this approach it would mean that they wanted to assist a group to achieve useful outcomes, become
part of the subject of study with the group and that reflection was an integral part of the process.

**Radical Humanist Paradigm**

Although there are differences between the interpretive and radical humanist paradigms the main connection point is the 'subjective idealist' position. Burrell and Morgan [1979] identify the differences between the paradigms as being that:

The interpretive and radical humanist paradigms are both founded upon the notion that the individual creates the world in which he lives. But, whereas the interpretive theorists are content to understand the nature of this process, the radical humanists subject it to critique, focusing upon what they regard as the essentially alienated state of man. [1979:279]

The radical humanist paradigm’s German idealism ancestry “…comprises the subjective and objective idealist strains of thought…” [Burrell and Morgan 1979:282]. The main assumption of this paradigm is that individuals are continuously creating ideas, concepts and perspectives. In this way “…a world external to mind is created.” [Burrell and Morgan 1979:279]

A key principle associated with this paradigm is the notion that a human being can externalise their experiences to create their reality and that this “…in turn is reflected back upon them, and through which they became conscious of themselves and their actions.” [Burrell and Morgan 1979:280].

They go on to explain that humans can be set free from what they create and sustain around themselves [1979:306]. Therefore the underpinning concern is ‘freedom of human spirit’ from consciousness. The approach recognises that we need to understand how we can become trapped within ourselves so that, if we wanted to, we could set ourselves free to help find within us ‘…the growth and development of human potentialities’ [1979:306].

From a research perspective this means the researcher is concerned with helping a group to:

- become aware of each individual’s trapped consciousness
• gain the group’s agreement and cooperation to become liberated
• raise awareness of unconscious patterns within the minds of each person in the group and
• gain a commitment to learning and change from group members.

What does this form of research assume? Trying to help a group to create a new and different reality, or way of seeing and doing, is no mean feat. Central to this notion is the necessity for the group to want to change and learn to do things differently to create a new reality. Some level of internalisation needs to exist. This paradigm in conjunction with double-loop learning [discussed in chapter 2] helps a group to confront existing ‘governing values’ associated with current states of reality and explore a new way of seeing, being and doing. [Argyris and Schon in Dick and Dalmau 2004:26]

One of the obligations under this paradigm is a commitment to generate ‘revolutionary changes in society’ rather than reinforcing the status quo [Burrell and Morgan 1979:307]. The exception to this commitment is where the researcher is working with a group who have already internalised a need to change in order to create a new reality.

McNiff and Whitehead [2006:41] also describe this form of research as assuming that:
• It is important to understand a situation in order to change it.
• Social situations are created by people, so can be deconstructed and reconstructed by people.
• Taken for granted situations need to be seen in terms of what has brought them into existence, especially in terms of relationships of power. [2006:41].

TENSIONS BETWEEN RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Immediately, this has the potential to set up tensions between and within the group and researcher. Tension can arise when you ask people to question what they do automatically and without thinking. When behaviours are so embedded,
when someone else asks you to look at what you say and do in order to create change, this can be quite daunting for everyone concerned.

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:5] summarise the ontological and epistemological differences between paradigms. They also identify how theory is developed and the role of the researcher in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philosophical Foundations</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Hermeneutic and postmodernism</th>
<th>Critical realism and action research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Objectivist</td>
<td>Subjectivist</td>
<td>Objectivist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Objectivist</td>
<td>Subjectivist</td>
<td>Subjectivist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Generalizable</td>
<td>Particular</td>
<td>Particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>Methodological</td>
<td>Hyper</td>
<td>Epistemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Researcher</td>
<td>Distance from data</td>
<td>Close to data</td>
<td>Close to data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Source: Coghlan and Brannick [2005:5]

Deetz [1996:194] suggests that classifying research programs on a subjective-objective dimension does them an injustice and leads to distorted understandings. Qualitative and quantitative methods, for example, can both be reduced to a way of collecting data rather than asking what was the intent of the analysis and research. He goes on to assert that researchers are trying to research different phenomena for different reasons, that there needs to be communication across paradigms and different groups need to try to build a world together.

Hence different paradigms also have different protocols in terms of research methods. The protocols relating to positivist and action research traditions are also compared in the following table.
Protocols of Different Research Traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positivist Tradition</th>
<th>Action Research Tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External reality exists</td>
<td>Based on the individual’s perceptions of reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent value-free research can examine reality [objectivist]</td>
<td>There is no objective or single knowable external reality therefore inquiry is inherently value-laden [subjective]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity concentrating on improving methods and their application.</td>
<td>Hyper-reflexivity which focuses on reflexive deconstruction of own practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of generalizable knowledge or covering laws</td>
<td>Means that any single case that runs counter to a generalisation invalidates it [Lewin, 1948] and requires the generalisation to be reformulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings validated by logic, measurement and consistency achieved through prediction and control.</td>
<td>Nothing can be measured without changing it and the researcher provides valid rich and deep data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivist scientist’s relationship to setting is one of neutrality and detachment.</td>
<td>The researcher is an integral part of the research process not separate from it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Source: Coghlan and Brannick [2005:6-7] & Greenwood & Levin [in Denzin & Lincoln 2000:97]

Such differences between research paradigms create a number of dilemmas for researchers and groups. The main issues are considered below.

THE RESEARCH DILEMMA

Whatever paradigm is operating, a person usually tends to believe their paradigm is right and everyone else is wrong [Herr and Anderson cite Argyris 2005:14]! Commitment to the way we do things governs our life and we become disconcerted when others act or propose to act in contradiction to our paradigm [Carlopio 1998:16 and Dennard 1996:495]. Some people have been known to
become extremely competitive and aggressive if their ways of doing things are being threatened by others [Carlopio 1998:16].

To reinforce this point, Argyris [in Herr and Anderson 2005:14] says that individuals have an inherent sense of what works and what doesn’t work and there is an extremely powerful unconscious pattern within us to maintain this status quo. In fact, the pattern is so powerful it is not only ‘taken for granted’, it continually goes unchallenged. Hence the earlier discussion likening a paradigm change to a revolution!

Furthermore, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe [1991:26] declare that “…in practice positivists support the interests of the more powerful members of society”. They also point out that although positivists claim “…to be independent of values and interests” they can’t be because they support “…the more powerful members of society”.

As previously stated the two main paradigms that compete with one another the most are the positivist and constructivist approaches. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe [1991:26] agree with this view and say that "in the red corner is phenomenology [or social constructionist] and in the blue corner is positivism.” Key features between both paradigms are outlined in the table below:
Comparison between Positivist and Phenomenological Paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic beliefs:</th>
<th>Positivist Paradigm</th>
<th>Phenomenological Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The world is external and</td>
<td>The world is socially constructed and subjective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objective</td>
<td>Observer is part of what is observed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer is independent</td>
<td>Science is driven by human interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science is value-free</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher should:</td>
<td>Focus on facts</td>
<td>Focus on meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on facts</td>
<td>Look for causality and fundamental laws</td>
<td>Try to understand what is happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for causality and</td>
<td>Reduce phenomena to simplest elements</td>
<td>Look at the totality of each situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fundamental laws</td>
<td>Formulate hypotheses and then test them</td>
<td>Develop ideas through induction from data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred methods include:</td>
<td>Operationalise concepts so that they can be measured</td>
<td>Using multiple methods to establish different views of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking large samples</td>
<td></td>
<td>phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small samples investigated in</td>
<td></td>
<td>Small samples investigated in depth or over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depth or over time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Source: Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Lowe [1991:27]

Challenges in selecting a research methodology may start to become apparent, if we were to ask the “So what?” question to this comparison table. For example, depending on the paradigm operating in the organisation, the selection of a research approach may need to take into account the organisation’s culture, the extent of the bureaucracy, the extent of the systems and whether they work, what individuals value and how they practice their values each day.

Another example which may present itself is where a positivist organisation may not feel totally comfortable within a research paradigm that will not provide specific outcomes to the research commencing. Also, as suggested by Herr and Anderson who cite Argyris [2205:14] in relation to an action research paradigm such an organisation “…may not be thrilled at the idea of [such] close examination.” Understanding boundaries allows a researcher to understand how a constructivist or positivist paradigm may impact on research and possible
resistance that may be encountered and adjust responses, actions and outcomes.

The figure below attempts to show the relationship, connections and dissonance that may be created depending on the paradigms of individuals and the organisation. However this is dependent on whether:

- The organisation and researcher have a positivist predisposition.
- The researcher and organisation have differing paradigms.
- The different paradigms cause communication difficulties or are incommensurable and therefore cannot hear one another.

**RESEARCH DILEMMA [FIGURE 7]**

**Positivist Organisation**
- Power and Control
- Hierarchy and Bureaucracy
- Stability and Structure
- Leadership and Order from above
- Regularity and Standardisation

**Constructivist Individual**
- Assumptions
- Beliefs
- Values
- Perceptions
- Behaviour

**Environment**
- Uncertainty
- Paradox
- Revolutions
- Challenge

**Positivist Paradigm**
- World is external and objective
- Observer is not part of what is observed
- Large samples
- Scientifically driven – reductionism
- Focussed on facts and measured

**Constructivist Paradigm**
- World socially constructed and subjective
- Observer part of what is observed
- Small samples
- Human interest driven
- Focussed on meaning.

What is the likelihood of responding to change and research?
SELECTION OF A RESEARCH PARADIGM

Is a Positivist Paradigm Appropriate?

Positivists believe that science can discover a single reality concerning a research problem. If the research is undertaken correctly and is based on observation, the outcomes can be relied upon as being trustworthy [Guba and Lincoln 1994]. To achieve these aims methodologies used include well-structured and controlled experiments and surveys. In this way findings are validated by logic, measurement and consistency achieved through prediction and control.

Traditionally, positivist science has been promulgated as being the preferred methodology because it is seen as being ‘true’ and objective due to its use of quantification [Guba and Lincoln 1994:105]. For these reasons, it is generally known as “hard” science. A subjective and quantifiable approach such as action research is often known as being “soft” and not so reliable.

In terms of this research project the pursuit is one of trying to understand human experience in an organisation, hence a positivist approach is not considered suitable.

The Constructivist Paradigm

On the other hand constructivists believe truth as being subjective and that there is no one way of seeing the world. It is therefore a world of multiple realities. Hence the researcher is an involved participant using dialogue and consensus as an approach. In contrast with positivists, the researcher is a participant in the process as well as being an observer.

It is a holistic approach which takes into account the cognition and perception of people involved in the research – human understanding and human experience.
which is the main focus of this research. The important elements within this paradigm are that it is a useful process to use with a group to solve some problems and formulate and work toward achieving a goal. Schwandt [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:200] confirm that:

The qualitative inquiry movement is built on a profound concern with understanding what other human beings are doing or saying. The philosophies of interpretivism, philosophical hermeneutics, and social constructionism provide different ways of addressing this concern [2000:200].

It seems writers have comprehensively argued the validity of an action research approach as opposed to the dominant positivist science. Even so, it may be narrow-minded not to point out that positivist science has aided research in terms of predictions of human behaviour and statistical data. It is also important to point out that qualitative and quantitative methods can and have been used concurrently. Unsurprisingly, however, action research does not sit comfortably with positivist science.

The reason behind this discomfort is a perceived gap associated with positivist science. For example, it fails to deal with the complexity of the behaviour of individual groups of people in specific situations. Action research is therefore the preferred methodology because it is an approach which acknowledges that each situation is unique and that general theory cannot be applied, a-priori. This means action research cannot be applied or based on something assumed or known. The result is that resistance may be experienced in positivist organisations who want to know what outcome will be achieved prior to research being commenced.

**Should the Status Quo be Maintained?**

Herr and Anderson [2005] citing Argyris et al [1985] help to answer the question: Should the status quo be maintained?:

In social life, the status quo exists because the norms and rules learned through socialization have been internalized and are continually reinforced. Human beings learn which skills work within the status quo and which do not work. The more the skills work, the more they influence individuals’ sense of
competence. Individuals draw on such skills and justify their use by identifying the values embedded in them and adhering to these values. The interdependence among norms, rules, skills, and values creates a pattern called the status quo that becomes so omnipresent as to be taken for granted and to go unchallenged. Precisely because these patterns are taken for granted, precisely because these skills are automatic, precisely because values are internalized, the status quo and individuals' personal responsibility for maintaining it cannot be studied without confronting it. [2005:14]

If we accept that the culture within the public sector is risk averse, controlling and not open to changing the status quo, then it seems essential not to use a research paradigm that will not challenge preconceived ways of doing things. All that would do it seems, is continue to support what exists rather than explore and possibly confront alternatives.

Herr and Anderson [2005:14] confirm two main points: firstly, most organisations would not be delighted in a researcher taking a challenging approach and secondly, that “…problems will only be solved in a superficial and temporary manner” if researchers take the easy option and use a research paradigm that maintains the status quo.

**SUMMARY**

Four main research paradigms were identified: positivism, constructivism, critical theory and realism. Positivist and phenomenological paradigms were compared in an attempt to highlight the differences and the challenges in selecting a research methodology. Selecting a research paradigm should take into account the organisation's culture, extent of the bureaucracy, systemic gaps and how organisational and individual values are expressed. A constructivist approach was selected so the researcher can be an involved participant in the research and use dialogue and consensus in the research approach. This approach allows understanding of human experience within an organisation and involves a group to solve a real problem and work toward a practical solution that meets the group's needs. Even though a constructivist approach may not sit comfortably with the organisation it was selected so as not to support and perpetuate the status quo.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY
Chapter 4:

- Debates the difference between paradigms in terms of: generalisability, commensurability vs incommensurability, subjectivity vs objectivity and validity, credibility and reliability.
- Identifies the principles which underpin action research and some of the different action research approaches that can be used.
- Highlights some of the key features contained in action research.
- Identifies the need to manage group dynamics.
- Explains grounded theory elements and the complementary nature with action research.

INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the paradigm debates about methodological approaches to determine issues of: generalisability, commensurability vs incommensurability, subjectivity vs objectivity and validity, credibility and reliability. The principles which underpin action research are identified as are the key features contained in this approach. The chapter also addresses the need for a researcher to consider the management of group dynamics. Grounded theory is explored as a complementary approach to action research, data collection and the development of theory.
METHODOLOGY ISSUES

In terms of methodology, the main debate between paradigms appears to be the approaches used to determine: generalisability, commensurability vs incommensurability, subjectivity vs objectivity and validity, credibility and reliability.

Generalisability

Greenwood and Levin [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:97] say positivists often ignore dealing with the issue of generalisability. They show the differences in a positivist’s, as opposed to an action researcher’s, view to generalisation in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positivistic Research</th>
<th>Action Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The approach to generalisation has been to abstract from context, average out cases, lose sight of the world as lived in by human beings, and generally make the knowledge impossible to apply.</td>
<td>Means that any single case that runs counter to a generalisation invalidates it [Lewin, 1948] and requires the generalisation to be reformulated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 - Source: Greenwood and Levin [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:97]

This means issues and conclusions emerging from one research project are not necessarily readily transferable to another. Once developed therefore local theory has limited applicability.

Dick [2004:1] has an interesting perspective on action research and generalisability. He posits that even though it is commonly held that you cannot generalise from action research, if people try similar actions in similar settings and achieve similar outcomes, then it can be argued that generalisability has
been demonstrated. Personal generalisations can also be tested against the literature with other researchers carrying out similar actions with similar results.

Dick [2004:1] also suggests reference to relevant literature be avoided while experimenting with a new skill or a new process. The literature can be used at a later date to identify similarities and differences to generalisations, actions can be fine-tuned and generalisations which apply more generally noted.

From this discussion, it seems a researcher can rely on the notion that outcomes from their research may not be true for everyone but it may help another group develop understandings or add to the development of local theory elsewhere.

**Commensurability vs Incommensurability**

Another paradigmatic debate surrounds the issue of commensurability: whether paradigm elements can be mixed to broaden and represent more than one worldview [Lincoln and Guba in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:174]. They consider that the ‘blurring of genres’ is rapidly being fulfilled and that paradigms are ‘interbreeding’ [2000:164]. They go on to give a “cautious yes” in answer to this question and qualify their response by saying commensurability is possible “…especially if paradigms share axiomatic elements that are similar”. Axiomatic elements include areas of similar values and basic beliefs.

Lincoln and Guba [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:185] further qualify their “cautious yes” by admitting that it appears “highly unlikely” that positivists and phenomenologists will be able to find some way of resolving their differences.

An example of Lincoln and Guba’s suggestion that paradigms share axiomatic elements that are similar is made by Schwandt [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:197]. He says:

…we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge… [2000:197].
He goes on to express the view that “…knowing is not passive…” and we do not “…find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it”. What this means is that we:

…invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience…against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language and so forth. [2000:197]

Schwandt [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000] argues that the philosophical values that sit within a constructivist approach can also be seen within hermeneutics and interpretivism because:

The qualitative inquiry movement is built on a profound concern with understanding what other human beings are doing or saying. [2000:200]

To be explicit some paradigms share the value of wanting to understand human beings. It follows that elements within each paradigm may be able to be mixed to broaden and represent more than one worldview. So there are elements visible of both the interpretive and radical paradigms in the methodology.

**Subjectivity vs Objectivity**

The objectivity position is linked to positivists and quantitative researchers because these researchers “…employ the language of objectivity, distance, and control…” which underpins their way of doing science [Greenwood and Levin in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:92]. They confirm that quantitative research is valuable, and if carried out appropriately under proper conditions, can be very useful. However, they point out bureaucratic and authoritarian organisations have the capacity to misuse or take advantage of quantitative methods. They confirm this view by stating that it is:

…convenient for those in power who do not want to be the “subjects” of social research and who do not want criticism of their social actions to be brought forward by social researchers. [2000:93].

Being objective seems to be the direct opposite of a human inquiry research approach because it leads to relationships which are separate between the
researcher and those being researched! Greenwood and Levin [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:95] say they are:

...amazed by the emphasis so many conventional social scientists still place on the claim that being “scientific” requires researchers to sever all relations with the observed [2000:95].

They also claim this is not possible because:

...you cannot separate mind from body, praxis from reflection, science from social action [and]...ignore the holistic nature of real-life problem situations. [2000:95].

Lincoln and Guba [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:176] agree with this view and add that “control” is intricately woven within “mandates for objectivity” because it impacts on voice [who can be heard and how] as well as reflexivity. Etherington [2004] agrees and says that researcher reflexivity is:

…the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts [which might be fluid and changing] inform the process and outcomes of inquiry. [2004:31]

Etherington [2004:27] also says that because knowledge is so closely linked to power it “…can sometimes be used to oppress [Foucault 1980]”. Also that due to changes in feminist researcher approaches in terms of ethics, validity and representation, researchers are now encouraging and facilitating “…voices that had previously been marginalised and oppressed…” [2004:27].

A view expressed by Dick [2004:1] argues that researchers “…can to some extent integrate the subjective and the objective.’ He says this is done first by the participants [which includes the researcher] investing their own values and meanings during the process and thus being subjective. Secondly, these views are ‘…tested against reality through action’ and thus ‘…gain objectivity in its most pragmatic sense’. A researcher can consider using this approach in their research project.
Validity, Credibility and Reliability

Validity, credibility and reliability is the area of most fertile debate and creates the most controversy [Greenwood and Levin in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:178].

Herr and Anderson [2005:49] explain that terms such as validity, credibility and the like are inadequate in describing goals from action research because ‘…neither acknowledges its action-oriented outcomes’. So as not to create a new descriptor, they qualify their view by preferring the term ‘validity’ and go on to explain that:

…the naturalistic researchers insisted on their own validity criteria…because they felt their work would be unfairly evaluated by others’ criteria. We likewise suggest that action research should not be judged by the same validity criteria with which we judge positivistic and naturalistic research. …One test of the validity of action research is the extent to which actions occur, which leads to a resolution of the problem that led to the study. [2005:53; 55]

They explain that the five main action research goals which have corresponding validity criteria, need to be linked to the goals of action research as outlined in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of Action Research</th>
<th>Quality/Validity Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The generation of new knowledge</td>
<td>Dialogic and process validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The achievement of action-oriented outcomes</td>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The education of both researcher and participants</td>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results that are relevant to the local setting</td>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sound and appropriate research methodology</td>
<td>Process validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Source: Herr and Anderson [2005:55]
Greenwood and Levin [in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:96] also agree that action research can be measured in terms of the extent a group acts on results emanating from the research. Did the research solve the problem? Did the group put something new in place? To what degree did the outcomes meet their expectations? Answers to such questions improve validity in their view.

Of particular note is the point made by Coghlan and Brannick [2005:28] that it is not whether the process was a success in term of results, instead emphasis needs to be placed on the exploration of the data. In their view it is more important:

...how a particular change was managed [and whether it] provides useful and interesting theory which may contribute to learning on the subject of change management.

In developing their methodology, researchers can place emphasis on process management, the development of theory and how it may have contributed to learning in terms of change. The success or otherwise of the project can be a secondary issue.

CRITICAL THEORY AND ACTION RESEARCH

Although action research grew from critical theory it extends the thinking of this paradigm [McNiff and Whitehead 2006:41].

For example, critical theory asks the question: ‘How can this situation be understood in order to change it?’ Action research takes a further step by asking: ‘How can it be changed?’ [2006:41]. They emphasize however that researchers “…still like to locate action research within a broad framework of critical theory, emphasizing its participatory nature to combat relations of power.”

This means that researchers need to be aware that participation will be a critical part of the action research method.
PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING ACTION RESEARCH

The principles underpinning action research extend into areas of methodological assumptions which include: emergent theory, critical reflection, holism, the use of questioning techniques and positionality.

Emergent theory

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:3] explain that issues emerge from trying to solve a real organisational problem. The process is not only trying to bring about change but it also attempts to improve the 'self-help' capability of people in an organisation by collaborating and inquiring into a problem together. Action research is not hoping to achieve a ‘…fixed outcome that can be applied everywhere’ [McNiff and Whitehead 2006:27]. Researchers are attempting to learn and to help a group learn to understand themselves and their practice.

What does this mean in real terms for a researcher? In short, knowledge is uncertain and indistinct. There is no one answer – no single truth. This is because answers to questions can generate a number of ways of looking at a problem and “…answers are incommensurable and cannot be resolved”. McNiff and Whitehead [2006:27] also argue that due to the developmental nature of the process “…knowledge is created, not discovered”. They go on to say that the action research methodology needs to be open-ended and developmental in nature because through the cycles of action and reflection it allows for ongoing learning and change [McNiff and Whitehead 2006:30].

Coghlan and Brannick 2005:22 agree with McNiff and Whitehead in relation to cycles of action and reflection which then lead to a change in diagnosis. They explain that each change in diagnosis guides a shift in focus and learning. Each step and change in diagnosis needs to be recorded as the next diagnosis occurs and consequential shift in focus.
Through cycles of action and reflection, results constantly change and the researcher becomes “…the enabler of emergent information and action” [Coghlan and Brannick 2005:39].

To further confirm this position, Herr and Anderson [2005:58] cite Reason and Bradbury as seeing action research as an:

…emergent, evolutionary and educational process of engaging with self, persons and communities that needs to be sustained for a significant period of time [2005:58].

**Critical Reflection**

The notion of an emergent and educative process that allows learning and change to develop is further reinforced in action research by the practice of critical reflection. The need for critical reflection is described lucidly by Cherry [1999:22] when she says that:

…both researcher and client may, unknowingly, be wearing blinkers which limit their understanding. This is the state of unconscious incompetence: we don’t even know that we don’t know! [1999:22]

Critical reflection is embedded within action research and has the potential to reveal those dark, dusty unused places within us that not only are we unaware of, but we don’t often explore because we do things so automatically and naturally.

Hence action research presents both the researcher and the research group with opportunities “…to learn from and through experience”. [Cherry 1999:9]. Individuals are expected to use some form of recording to track their view of incidents that happen during the course of the research. So the practice of critical reflection encourages participants to systematically reflect on incidents. One mechanism to do this is by using a questioning technique such as:

…what exactly happened?, what did I do?, what did I say?, what did others do or say?, how did I feel about what was happening?, do I have any idea of how they felt?, what was the impact of what I – and they – did?, did I do what I really wanted or needed to do?, if not, do I know why not?, what would I do differently next time? [Cherry 1999:9].

And
Because reflection leads back into action of one kind or another, and action is followed by reflection of one kind or another, this technique increases the possibility that applied learning will occur. I define applied learning as a sustained change in behaviour [Cherry 1999:9].

There is a cost where change in behaviour is concerned. Cherry [1999:40] acknowledges that in critical reflection there can be emotional cost in not only coming to terms with the knowledge and new learning but also difficulties that may be encountered in facilitating an action research / change approach with others. This is due to not everyone being grateful for the new learning and knowledge as much as they agreed to be part of the process. As Cherry [1999:23] pragmatically points out:

Sometimes the world is grateful for this newness and sometimes the action researcher is confronted with resistance from clients, colleagues and other stakeholders.

The central premise to critical reflection is to record incidents that caused some frustration, discomfort, challenge, unhappiness and/or something that did not quite go according to plan and took us outside our comfort zone.

**Questioning Approach**

Individuals who participate in action research can find it extremely powerful and liberating. This is not to say that everyone will want to embrace action research! A few of the reasons that some may not find the process comfortable, powerful or liberating are provided above. But there is an opportunity embedded in the process that allows individuals to question their practice, explore options of doing things differently and live their values. This is not done by someone telling them what to do or how to do it. One of the ways is through negotiation and discussion so the group makes these decisions. [McNiff and Whitehead 2006:8]. Questioning techniques used by the researcher helps in that regard.

In pinpointing the extent of a questioning approach in the action research project, Cherry [1999] asks a researcher to consider the following issues when developing their methodology:
How far are you prepared to fundamentally challenge your client or ‘other’?
How far are you prepared to challenge your own practice and mindset?
Why am I doing what I’m doing?
Why do I think this will be appropriate or effective? [1999:6-7]

Cherry [1999:29] clarifies further the questioning approach by stating that the breadth and level of questions directed to a group is what sustains that inquiry. She points out that:

…action research is, by its nature, a process of sustained and critical inquiry, and it is the failure to sustain inquiry which ultimately limits the quality and depth of the action, knowledge and learning work. [1999:29].

One of the biggest challenges is to invite an organisation to ‘discuss the undiscussables’ and Cherry [1999:35] cites Goss et al who state that:

There is a code of silence in most corporations that conceals the full extent of a corporation’s competitive weakness. But a threat that everyone perceives and no one talks about is far more debilitating to a company than a threat that has been clearly revealed. **Companies, like people, tend to be at least as sick as their secrets.**

To improve ‘ground truth’ and examine our current reality, Scott [2002:49] confirms that organisations and the people within it should continually question themselves by asking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What’s changed since last we met?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are we succeeding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are we failing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have we learned in the last few months?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is required of us now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the plan still make sense?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If not, what needs to change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[2002:49]

McNiff and Whitehead [2006:8] suggest that a researcher should understand the nature of questions to ensure they ask action research rather than social science questions. The difference in the two questioning techniques is set out in the table below:
Difference between Social Science and Action Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social science questions</th>
<th>Action research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the relationship between worker motivation and worker retention?</td>
<td>How do I influence the quality of workers’ experience in the workplace, so that they decide to stay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does management style influence worker productivity?</td>
<td>How do I improve my management style to encourage productivity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will a different seating arrangement increase audience participation?</td>
<td>How do I encourage greater audience participation through trying out different seating arrangements?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 - Source: McNiff and Whitehead 2006:8

To further explain the creation of appropriate questions, they also state that social science researchers ask questions like: what are those people doing?, what do they say?, how many of them do it? Whereas action researchers ask: how do I understand what I am doing?, how do I improve it? McNiff and Whitehead [2006:15] point out that a researcher needs to be mindful of the different types of questions that exist for different purposes.

Different Types of Questions for Different Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do I ….? questions</th>
<th>What is happening here? questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do I stop bullying and aggression in this workplace?</td>
<td>How many staff are being bullied?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who is bullying whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why are they bullying them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 - Source: McNiff and Whitehead [2006:15]

When undertaking action research, Cherry [1999:13] suggests the use of trigger questions to reveal real intentions, the use of team learning skills which includes suspending judgement, active listening, respecting difference and the use of dialogue skills.
Holistic View

Whole Systems Thinking and Participation

Remenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz [1998:36] confirm that a phenomenological approach to research “...is not reductionist but holistic”. This means that the research can focus on a variety of “...variables being studied” as well as “...the context of the study”. Remenyi et al also confirm that phenomenological research allows for complicated human studies to be examined rather than being removed as they would in a positivist study [1998:36]. They claim that at the end of the research “...a still photograph of the variables being studied” can be produced [1998:36].

Reason [1988] says taking a whole systems thinking approach can shift research into higher levels of complexity because “...wholeness requires participation” and “...participation means empathy” [1988:10]. This concept of ‘wholeness’ is explained as being all parts belonging together and everything being connected. Such thinking he says is very ”...different from that of positivist science” [Reason 1988:10]. Importantly he points out that “...non-hierarchical thinking-in-action is quite foreign to western thinking” because instead of seeing the world in a mechanistic cause-and-effect manner, due to complexity of systems we need to see “...networks of understanding” [1988:11].

One of the main principles contained within action research is that it ‘... is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation’ [Herr and Anderson 2005:4]. This acknowledges the precept that for change to be successful as many of the people affected by the change need to be part of the process.

Bawden [1997:7] draws on ideas from Burrell and Morgan [1979] in developing a holism worldview matrix. On the ontological dimension introduced by Bawden you would either accept the holistic view that you cannot reduce the wholeness of nature and other systems or you do not – in which case it is reductionism. On the epistemological position you either accept that things are rational, permanent,
truth, goodness or rightness can be known and therefore be an objectivist or you do not – in which case you are a relativist.

Bawden’s Worldview Matrix

The matrix begins to unearth the tensions of difference between our worldviews and Bawden [1997:2] also makes the point that:

The notion of wholeness through ‘tensions of difference’ is absolutely central to the usefulness of the critical learning systems approach to community development. … The central notion is that meaning is a property which is emergent in both individuals and communities, through the interactions of different ‘ways of knowing’. [1997:4]

What does this mean in terms of an action research project? It is probably proactive to try to build into the methodology discussion about these tensions of difference and also about the nature and influence of worldviews on the process of learning.
There are other complexities in undertaking action research especially where it is undertaken in your own organisation. When that happens, Coghlan and Brannick (2005:47) suggest that it is ‘…opportunistic, that is, you may be selecting an issue for research which is occurring anyway’.

Coghlan and Brannick (2005:48) also strongly suggest that there is a need to “…differentiate between the researcher and the system in and on which the action research is taking place”. In one insider research example, evaluation of the research focussed on quality and rigour of inquiry rather than whether it was successful, given the researcher’s insider status.

Also, Coghlan and Casey (2001:676) provide significant insight into the challenges and the benefits of insider research. Some of the insider research key advantages and disadvantages identified by Coghlan and Casey 2001:676 are:

### Advantages/Disadvantages of Insider Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, insights and experience before engaging in research</td>
<td>Knowledge may impede questioning and interviewing because researcher may assume too much and not probe enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher has theoretical understanding of organisational dynamics and lived experience</td>
<td>Researcher may think they know the answers and not expose their current thinking to reframing issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of everyday organisational life, jargon, legitimate and taboo phenomena, what can/cannot be talked about</td>
<td>Difficult to obtain data because access is cross departmental, functional or hierarchical boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher understands what occupies colleagues’ minds</td>
<td>Access is denied to an internal researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher knows how informal organisation works and to whom to turn to for information and gossip</td>
<td>Difficulty in feeding back research because of nature of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can participate in discussions or just observe</td>
<td>Difficult in managing organisational politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others may not be aware of researcher’s presence – participate without drawing attention to self or creating suspicion</td>
<td>Relationships affect data generated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher can obtain richer data and draw on above issues to ask questions during interviews</td>
<td>Rigorous introspection and reflection impeded by organisational politics and underlying assumptions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 - Source: Coghlan and Casey [2001:676]

Also, Coghlan [2003] identified and confirmed that there are two ways of undertaking action learning research: one is mechanistic-oriented and the other organistic-oriented. Coghlan says:

> By ‘mechanistic’ I mean that the action research is framed in terms of managing change or solving a problem – it is directed at confronting and resolving a pre-identified issue. Together, they name the issue, articulate a desired outcome, plan, take action and evaluate the action. In an organistic-oriented situation, the participants themselves engage in an action inquiry process in which inquiry into their own assumptions and ways of thinking and acting is central to the research process. [2003:453]

Essentially, Coghlan [2003:460] says that both approaches can be combined. He acknowledges that the mechanistic-oriented approach is seen as traditional which leads to pragmatic outcomes. Whereas, organistic-oriented action research is:

> …more complex and subversive because it addresses issues of transformation of being and values as behaviour in action is studied and underlying assumptions and values questioned.

Changes in values and behaviour can take time – it is not instantaneous. A combination of both approaches would be used with the research group.
Herr and Anderson [2005:51] believe that “to the extent that a true partnership exists, the action researcher over time begins to take an insider perspective.” This is an issue that a researcher needs to bear in mind when facilitating the research. In taking an insider perspective, over time, there was potential to stop asking the indepth type of questions that need to be asked of the group.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ACTION RESEARCH APPROACHES?

Reason [1988:2] believes that there are three schools of inquiry in the paradigm shift: participatory research, action inquirers and experiential researchers. He says:

Participatory researchers will be engaging in dialogue with groups in their natural settings; action-inquirers will be reflecting on their experiences of social action; experiential researchers will be setting up and working with inquiry groups. [1988:2]

He also confirms that researchers can borrow from all schools and develop an approach to suit different situations and needs associated with groups and organisations. Coghlan and Brannick [2005:19] agree that “…different methodologies are not mutually exclusive”. They say that processes in terms of joint planning, agreed actions, collaboration and reflection can be used across the different approaches.

Other research approaches include: traditional action research, action learning, action science and evaluative inquiry [Coghlan and Brannick 2005:14]. A short précis of the core values and processes contained in these approaches follows.

Traditional Action Research

Kurt Lewin has been credited with being the main founder of action research [Coghlan and Brannick 2005:14]. Key aspects of the research involve collaboratively creating change which helps solve a problem and generates new
knowledge. The researcher and the group engage in cycles of planning, taking action and evaluating the real life problem. Participation is a central theme as is improving practice and developing individuals. It is value laden hence the ability to reflect is critical so as to interrogate perceived improvements or solutions in terms of who benefits. Reason [1988:13] states that holding humanistic values that translate into democratic processes is a key feature of action research.

Herr and Anderson [2005:5] cite Argyris and Schon [1991] as claiming there is a double burden associated with action research because:

- Action denotes improving practice; and
- Research indicates that valid knowledge will be created about practice.

Cherry [1999:xiii] says there are three strands to action research work. She says these are: an action strand, knowledge strand and learning strand and researchers should make such distinctions evident in their work.

**Action Learning**

This approach is credited around Revan’s learning formula: L=P+Q [Coghlan and Brannick 2005:15]. L stands for learning, P for programmed learning [i.e. current knowledge in use, already known, what is in books and so on] and Q for questioning insight. It is a process that helps to develop people in organisations by selecting a real problem, nominating managers, and allowing them to learn and help one another to learn from each other. Rigour is experienced through cycles of action and reflection. Coghlan and Brannick [2005:15] cite Revans [1998:83] as saying:

> There can be no learning without action and no [sober and deliberate] action without learning. ...Those unable to change themselves cannot change what goes on around them [2005:15].

**Action Science**

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:16] state that:
Action science is associated with the work of Chris Argyris [Argyris et al., 1985; Friedman, 2001a; Argyris, 2004]. Argyris places an emphasis on the cognitive processes of individuals' ‘theories-in-use’, which he describes in terms of Model 1 [strategies of control, self-protection, defensiveness and covering up embarrassment] and Model 11 [strategies eliciting valid information, free choice and commitment]. Attention to how individuals' theories-in-use create organisational defensiveness is an important approach to organisational learning [Argyris, 1990, 1999; Argyris and Schon, 1996; Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1994].

Evaluative Inquiry

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:19] state that:

Closely related to action research is the process of evaluative inquiry which is a reformulation of traditional evaluation practices through an emphasis on using the process of inquiry to generate organizational learning [Preskill and Torres, 1999]. Many of the processes within action research, such as collaborative inquiry, reflection, joint planning and taking action are utilized as interventions to shape how projects are evaluated in order to stimulate organizational learning [2005:19].

KEY FEATURES OF ACTION RESEARCH

The main thread running within all four approaches is organisational learning. Other similarities that are apparent within each approach is: the ability to create change, collaboration and participation, solving a real problem, generating new knowledge, learning through cycles of action and reflection and improving practice. Humanistic values with a focus on equality and democracy which allows knowledge to emerge through authentic collaboration is another thread contained within action research.

Dick [2004:1] confirms that many action research approaches share common features. The six characteristics he identifies within action research are that it is: change oriented; action oriented; data-based; emergent; cyclic; and participative [2004:1]

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:11] cite Gummesson [2000:16] as stating that action research is ‘the most demanding and far-reaching method of doing case study research’ particularly from a management perspective because you have to:
Take action
Be part of the research – researchers are not observers
Solve a problem and contribute to science
Gain the cooperation of group members
Develop holistic understanding and recognize complexity
Be prepared for the creation of change
Understand ethical frameworks
Understand all types of data gathering methods
Gain a breadth of preunderstanding
Conduct the research project in real time
Establish your own quality criteria. [2005:11]

All characteristics provide a researcher with options to choose from in terms of designing their methodology. The features allow the choice from an extensive menu which aid a researcher to select what best suits a given group, workplace and particular problem.

MANAGING GROUP DYNAMICS

Researchers also need to take into account issues of group dynamics. Managing group dynamics may take into account: the role of the researcher and group members, understanding stages of group development, motivations and behaviours from individuals and including critical review and reflection phases.

Roles

Herr and Anderson [2005:77] stress the importance for the researcher to acknowledge at the beginning of the project the complexity of roles for self as well as roles for the group. They suggest that often this issue is ‘.rendered invisible’. To help a researcher design their research process, they raise the following pertinent questions:

Who is the researcher to the research process?
What is the researcher bringing in terms of roles, values, beliefs, and experiences?
Is the researcher an insider to the research? An outsider? Somewhere on the continuum?
Reason [1988:41] similarly asks a set of questions of a researcher: Who am I to be in the group? How will I control and influence the group? Will the group’s needs and goals match mine? Will they accept me? How will I help the group to learn?

He explains that a full gamut of emotional behaviours can rise to the surface during research which includes: excitement, restimulation of old hurts, anger, frustration and behaviours that emerge from confronting other peoples’ reactions.

He identifies that the group needs a degree of emotional competence to manage any feelings appropriately. He says there are three roles that assist this process: co-counselling, personal growth facilitators and the use of honesty and openness by the researcher and members. [Reason 1988:29-30]. He also identifies three stages of group growth:

Schein [1988:47] confirms that when group members are preoccupied with their own feelings they are less likely to listen and participate in a learning process, let alone attempt to be creative to solve problems. He also confirms that often members will not share their emotional reactions with the whole group because ‘…it is not polite to share’ [1988:34]. These are all issues that a researcher needs to be aware of and deal with to limit possible group growing pains. Roles, rules and expectations are critical in developing the group.
focus on different skills and styles is another suggestion to assist the process [Reason 1988:26].

The aim in this section is to highlight the importance of making roles, rules, responsibilities, expectations and general group dynamics explicit during the process. The aim is also to highlight the need to factor into an action research process a degree of awareness and planning about how to deal with such issues if/when they surface.

Phases

*Action Learning / Action Research and Cycles of Reflection*

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:29] explain that for action research to be considered ‘good’ research a project needs to contain three main elements:

- A good story
- Rigorous reflection on that story
- An extrapolation of usable knowledge or theory from the reflection on the story. [2005:29]

They suggest that these elements can more readily be put into questions: ‘What happened? How do you make sense of what happened? So what?’ [2005:29]

Any process therefore needs to contain elements of action **and** reflection with continuous cycles of action and reflection. This means that action research does not believe that the first cycle of action will provide the answers or solve the problems.
Each action taken by a group creates a new direction, particularly if it is reflected upon, which then creates further action. So there is this continuous flow of action, reflection, new directions and so forth. Each time there is a new cycle of action and reflection it has the potential of raising and/or discovering new issues. This process allows groups to continually identify and address new objectives. It also has the potential of aiding people to learn in new ways.

Predicting the outcome of each cycle in advance is not possible, as is predicting the learning of the group and/or individuals. However, given the cycles of diagnosing, planning, acting and reflecting, action research seems to lend itself to continuous change and dealing with complexity in our work environments.

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:25] also explain that the spiral of action research cycles is the ‘core’ of the process but there is a second cycle operating in parallel. They describe this as meta learning [that is, learning about learning] and say that at the same time as you are carrying out the project, researchers need to be diagnosing, planning, taking action and evaluating ‘…about how the action research project itself is going and what you are learning’ [2005:25]. A model of this meta cycle of inquiry is:
Each action research cycle and meta cycle of inquiry is central to the development of actionable and achievable knowledge. The discussion and reflection involved in both cycles will demonstrate the quality and rigour involved in the research project and the development of theory.

What this means is that the whole process is strongly connected in terms of developing awareness, understanding and skills across every category and at every level. For example during the project a researcher can potentially reflect on what is happening within the organisation, the group and the self iteratively.

**Critical Review**

McNiff and Whitehead [2006:131] remind researchers of the need to produce work that is ethical particularly in terms of negotiating and securing access, protecting participants and assuring good faith. They also stress that the process used needs to have credibility in terms of monitoring practice and looking for data. They suggest researchers ask three questions:
What data am I looking for?
Where will I look for the data?
How will I monitor my practice over time? [2006:131]

In view of these questions it seems from the outset that a researcher needs to decide on who would be involved and how this involvement would take place. Coghlan and Brannick [2005:41] explain that data is generated when researchers ‘…inquire into what is going on, when you show people your train of thought and put forward hypotheses to be tested…’ [2005:41]. Hence researchers are an instrument in the generation of data.

To clarify this notion further, Cherry [1999:78] provides a definition of ‘critical subjectivity and knowing’. She says:

…it involves the researcher in a delicate balance: between, on the one hand, fully knowing the individuality of the meaning or sense one makes of one’s own and other’s data (including experience), and, on the other, being able to stand aside from the individuality and put it in some larger or different perspective which places a different meaning on the data.

Cherry [1999:78] describes the contradictory nature involved in this process as being one where a researcher has to be fully cognisant of their own learning and at the same time detach the self from the experience in order to distance the self and develop meaning. She also explains that to do this researchers need to understand their own values, their assumptions, attitudes and behaviours. She acknowledges the difficulty contained in the process and the need for double-loop learning. Critical friends, mentors and people who could aid in validation across the sector are other strategies to reality test and help researchers during a project.

Reflection

Cherry [1999:80] describes reflection as a ‘creative act’ because it is the ‘creation of meaning’ and ‘testing meaning’ by asking ‘what if’ questions. She also makes the point that reflection and the significance of that reflection may only be temporary. Yes, reflection may deal with an outcome of an incident at that
particular point in time but it has the potential to show a deeper meaning at some extended point in time. This is the nature of action research, once commenced learning can continue depending on the values of the individual.

Cherry [1999:82] agrees with Smith and Coghlan and Brannick that reflection is a rich meta cycle of inquiry. It was envisaged that these cycles of reflection would be a foundational part of the research. Coghlan and Brannick [2005:27] say:

> Attending to the action research cycle and to the meta cycle may involve more than simply attending to behaviour. You may draw from techniques in the qualitative research approaches through how you formulate the issue, collect and analyse data and report results (Sagor 1992). Techniques from grounded theory approaches may be useful once the core compatibilities and incompatibilities between the two approaches are recognized (Baskerville and Pries-Heje, 1999).

**GROUNDED THEORY**

What is grounded theory? What does it mean? Charmaz [2006:5] says that grounded theory is a methodology used by qualitative researchers to support action researchers with issues of validity. She cites Glaser and Strauss [1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987] in their seminal work as having made “…a cutting-edge statement…” which “…offered systematic strategies for qualitative research practice” [2006:5].

Charmaz [2006:8] discusses the developments in grounded theory and expresses the view that:

> For years, Glaser remained consistent with his earlier exegesis of the method and thus defined grounded theory as a method of discovery, treated categories as emergent from the data, relied on direct and, often, narrow empiricism, and analyzed a basic social process [2006:8].

She adopts this view in her explanation of grounded theory methods and its practice. The approach taken by Charmaz [2006] seems to be consistent with the initial approach taken by Glaser.
What are the principles of grounded theory?

Charmaz [2006:5] explains that the key principles of grounded theory practice [as discussed by Glaser and Strauss] are:

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses
- Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis
- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness
- Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis. [2006:5-6].

From its inception, Glaser [in Charmaz 2006:9] suggested that when put into practice grounded theory should be used in a flexible, emergent way and not as a set way of rules, regulations or prescriptions and packages. This view sits comfortably within the framework and principles of action research being adopted for this project.

Coding and Memo-Writing

Coding is an essential element of grounded theory [Charmaz 2006:11]. The two main types of coding are:

...initial line-by-line coding, a strategy which prompts you to study your data loosely – line-by-line- and to begin conceptualizing your ideas and...focused coding, which permits you to separate, sort, and synthesize large amounts of data [2006:11].
Buzan’s [2000] mind-mapping approach could aid the process in synthesizing large amounts of data. By clustering key issues as they start to emerge it may aid the researcher in seeing pictures and patterns. These pictures/patterns in conjunction with memo-writing could also help identify issues or areas of complexity to support the development of ideas and finally to help identify further data-gathering [Charmaz 2006:11].

**Theoretical Sampling, Saturation and Sorting**

What is theoretical sampling? Charmaz [2006:96] says it means:

…seeking pertinent data to develop your emerging theory. The main purpose of theoretical sampling is to elaborate and refine the categories constituting your theory. You conduct theoretical sampling by sampling to develop the properties of your category(ies) until no new properties emerge [2006:96].

Wherever the data appears to be thin, or too many assumptions are evident or unknown qualities are exposed, further theoretical sampling is needed because it directs you to where you need to go. Theoretical sampling helps refine categories and also identify when there are no further new matters that are emerging [Charmaz 2006:96]. The use of theoretical sampling also helps:

- Delineate the properties of the category
- Check hunches about categories
- Saturate the properties of a category
- Distinguish between categories
- Clarify relationships between emerging categories; and
- Identify variation in a process [Charmaz 2006:104].

More importantly, it was envisaged that theoretical sampling would aid toward theory development.
Reconstruction Theory

Charmaz [2006:149] also explains that the development of theory depends on a variety of areas and in particular:

…theories serve different purposes and differ in their inclusiveness, precision, level, scope, generality, and applicability.

The interpretive definition of theory development places emphasis on understanding what is happening rather than just exploring explanations [Charmaz 2006:126]. This approach sits comfortably and is consistent with action research methodology in terms of understanding participants involved in a project.

Charmaz [2006:126] explains that this ‘understanding’ comes from the researcher’s or “…theorist’s interpretation of the studied phenomenon.” Charmaz [2006:126] confirms that in constructivist grounded theory priority is given “…to showing patterns and connections rather than linear reasoning”. This view is confirmed in her definition on interpretive theory which:

… calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon. This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual. [2006:126]

Hence she says that the aim of interpretive grounded theory is to:

- Conceptualize the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms
- Articulate theoretical claims pertaining to scope, depth, power, and relevance
- Acknowledge subjectivity in theorizing and hence the role of negotiation, dialogue, understanding
- Offer an imaginative interpretation. [2006:127]

It is important to express the view that a researcher is deconstructing organisational life in attempting to answer questions like: “What do people assume is real? How do they construct and act on their view of reality?” [Charmaz 2006:127]. It would seem that some of the researcher’s own perception may impact on the answers. As a consequence, Charmaz [2006:127] says that:
Thus knowledge – and theories – are situated and located in particular positions, perspectives, and experiences.

The process of obtaining information from the group, appropriately questioning the data, comparing the data, drawing on external sources and testing my own reactions during the process with two mentors/coaches – would allow the data and analysis to emerge from all these experiences and relationships [Charmaz 2006:130].

Probing Deeply

To summarise, it was envisaged that credibility and validity of the methodology may increase through the process of:

- gathering rich data
- coding
- memo-writing
- sampling, saturation and sorting and
- theorizing to cover obvious issues.

Adding a further layer of trying to probe into implied meanings and responses from people would further enhance research outcomes. The overall approach to be used would need to select an appropriate research strategy. A table setting out the differences between inductive, deductive, retroductive and abductive research strategies is provided below. Each strategy presents alternative starting and concluding-points and different sets of steps between these points.
The Logic of Four Research Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inductive</th>
<th>Deductive</th>
<th>Retructive</th>
<th>Abductive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>Establish universal generalizations to be used as pattern explanations</td>
<td>Test theories to eliminate false ones and corroborate the survivor</td>
<td>Discover underlying mechanisms to explain observed regularities</td>
<td>Describe and understand social life in terms of social actors’ motives and accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>From</strong></td>
<td>Accumulate observations or data</td>
<td>Borrow or construct a theory and express it as an argument</td>
<td>Document and model a regularity</td>
<td>Discover everyday lay concepts, meanings and motives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Produce generalisations</td>
<td>Deduce hypotheses</td>
<td>Construct a hypothetical model of a mechanism</td>
<td>Produce a technical account from lay accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To</strong></td>
<td>Use these ‘laws’ as patterns to explain further observations</td>
<td>Test the hypotheses by matching them with data</td>
<td>Find the real mechanism by observation and/or experiment</td>
<td>Develop a theory and test it iteratively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 - Source: Blaikie 2000:101

METHODOLOGY CONCLUSIONS

The key issues drawn from this discussion that will be used in the project methodology include:

- The notion that outcomes from research may not be true for everyone but it may help another group develop understandings or aid in the development of local theory elsewhere.
- Elements within each paradigm may be able to be mixed to broaden and represent more than one worldview.
- To some extent researchers can integrate the subjective and the objective.
- Emphasis can be placed on process management, the development of theory and how it may contribute to learning in terms of change. The success or otherwise of the project can be seen as a secondary issue.
• Participation to create ownership is a critical part of action research, as is the creation of appropriate questions to aid in change and learning. The process needs to allow for different questioning techniques and questions that exist for different purposes. Overtime, there is potential to stop asking indepth questions that need to be asked of the group.

• The process should be explicit and discussions held about the tensions of difference due to the nature and influence of worldviews. Discussions need to make roles, rules, responsibilities, expectations and general group dynamics explicit during the process.

• Awareness and understanding develops iteratively for the researcher and the group. The process however can be contradictory in nature due to a researcher needing to be fully cognisant of their own learning and at the same time detach the self from the experience in order to distance the self and develop meaning. Critical friends, mentors and people can aid in validation across the sector and are strategies that will be used to help the researcher.

• Mind-mapping will be used to aid the process of synthesizing large amounts of data.

SUMMARY

In terms of methodology, the main debate between paradigms appears to be the approaches used to determine: generalisability, commensurability vs incommensurability, subjectivity vs objectivity and validity, credibility and reliability.

The principles underpinning action research extend into areas of methodological assumptions which include: emergent theory, critical reflection, holism, the use of questioning techniques and be cognisant of positionality.

Action research characteristics provide a researcher with a variety of options to choose from in terms of designing their methodology. The features allow the
choice from an extensive menu which aid a researcher to select what best suits a given group, workplace and particular problem.

A critical feature of action research is the need to contain elements of action and reflection with continuous cycles of action and reflection. This means that action research does not believe that the first cycle of action will provide the answers or solve the problems.

Grounded Theory is a methodology used by qualitative researchers to support action researchers with issues of validity. It is a complementary mechanism for action research and will be used in this project.
CHAPTER 5

PROJECT PROCESS
Chapter 5:

- Provides contextual information on the project’s purpose and outcomes.
- Explains how the project was designed to create participatory structures aided by action research cycles.
- Discusses data collection and assessment and how multiple data sources were used to provide contradictory and confirming interpretations.
- Confirms how assumptions and interpretations were constantly challenged and tested throughout the project.
- Describes how rigour was used to develop theory through a wide range of ways of knowing: intuitive, experiential, presentational and conceptual.

INTRODUCTION

In earlier chapters discussion centred on what organisations may or may not value, issues of enculturation, the positivist culture operating in the public sector and different paradigmatic ways of thinking and doing. Difficulties faced in changing our paradigms and how our assumptions, beliefs, values and perceptions influence our behaviour and our truths were also explored. Discussion centred on the different ontological and epistemological positivist and constructivist research paradigms and ways of thinking. The previous chapter explained the theoretical roots of action research and identified the paradigms compatible to its validity as a research approach. This chapter deals with the project process including: contextual project information, the design which
incorporates participatory structures and action research cycles, how data was collected, assessed and then challenged and how rigour was established to develop theory.

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**

Prior to discussing the project process, it is important to revisit the research topic and understand the contextual nature of the research. Issues concerning how the topic began and how entry was gained will be raised. Other issues will cover the purpose and outcomes of the project and some general observations about the group, the nature of their work and their work environment. The overall organisational culture within which the research will take place will also be explored.

**Gaining Entry**

In mid-2004 a Northern Territory Public Sector agency had just lost its very long-term Chief Executive. The agency was in a state of flux with change being experienced at most levels. The new Chief Executive instituted a fairly significant restructure and review of all divisions. Wherever major change is occurring, it seems a good opportunity to explore the possibility of an intervention and/or research project because such projects can help to bed down change - so I approached the new Chief Executive.

Gaining entry was greatly assisted by having previously worked with the new agency’s Chief Executive. Obtaining an appointment was relatively easy because of the existing working relationship arising out of the Chief Executive’s former agency. At the meeting I raised the issue of changes in terms of the agency’s reviews and restructures and asked if there was an opportunity to undertake an action research project somewhere in the organisation. Given that there was a level of confidence which existed in the relationship he agreed and raised the possibility of a project in a division that had just undergone a major review and restructure with involvement from an external consultant.
We spent some time discussing the nature of the doctorate and some general issues that arise from action learning, action research projects. He seemed positive and suggested negotiation of project specifics take place between me and the group’s executives who had just finalised the division’s restructure. He passed on his in-principle agreement to the executives verbally.

Contact was then made with the Executive Director and Director of the group. As a cross-sector relationship also existed with the Executive Director of this division again there was a degree of credibility and confidence that existed between us. The Executive Director was also well known in the public sector as someone who promoted and supported employee professional development and someone who had an open mind about learning and change. Connecting with people who knew me and supported learning, boded well for the development of a project.

The division which had just participated in a major review undertaken by an external consultant had done so because the mandate was to attract and increase global exploration and investment dollars. The review identified gaps in leadership and financial skill sets for program and project leaders. People capability and structural issues appeared to underpin the main review topics. To gain a better global position and to improve performance, the group were instructed to:

- Focus on core business functions and being able to measure outcomes
- Implement a more disciplined approach to project management
- Align the structure and skills of people to the business; and
- Build links with industry and community.

**Project Topic**

Initially the project topic identified for me was improving the project management approach for the group. This did not eventuate. The executives were unaware that a colleague within the agency had already been identified to undertake this
project. A few weeks later the group’s Director asked for help with the change process and to develop a new performance management/development program. The project aims were to:

- Obtain staff “buy-in” to the change and people management issues
- Conduct a series of group sessions with all staff [Darwin and Alice Springs] to develop a performance management/development program and accelerate individual learning programs
- Provide a method to create improved team capability to deliver on projects, programs and governance systems.

Having an established relationship, level of trust and rapport with the executives of the agency definitely helped gain entry as well as identifying a project. However, the importance of building rapport with the participants of the project group could not be disregarded or underestimated.

At the start of the project, it was agreed that the whole division would be included. This meant working with 80+ employees located in Darwin and Alice Springs! After two meetings with the whole group it became apparent that this number of people was too ambitious from a process, participation and decision-making perspective. It was agreed that we would mainly work with the management group within the division: eleven managers.

**Organisational Environmental and Cultural Factors**

Given the mandate to “obtain staff buy-in” to the change and people management issues, the process needed to include discussion and questions on the extent that the project group were part of the review process. Other issues that needed to be explored during opening meetings with the group were:

1. The extent of ownership to review changes.
2. Whether the process included sufficient time to reflect, evaluate and make suggestions to help understanding and to generate trust [Carlopio, 1998].
3. The extent staff provided input into the review itself.

4. Staff’s reaction and behaviours since the review/restructure.

Exploration of these issues were considered significant because in other action inquiry processes it had been found that when there is a concerted and focussed method ensuring strong participation at every level, review programs and change are successful. Reason [1988:149] confirms this view by providing insight into the extensive participation of staff at The City Labour-Management Co-operation Programme. The action inquiry included three-tiers within the organisation – the worksite groups, labour-management departmental committees and a Citywide Oversite Committee. The participation occurred at every level so that:

- Employees and supervisors developed approaches to solve worksite problems
- The committees helped them to clarify and implement initiatives
- Areas of concern were able to be identified and improved
- Staff were trained in facilitation, developing proposals and how to work effectively in a bureaucracy
- Noticeable improvements were made in management styles
- Improvements and changes were constantly made to programme processes
- Overall it improved everyone’s listening and communication skills. [1988:149].

The notion that there is value in including the project group in the process to help them to reflect on their behaviour, attitudes and feelings to try to do things differently, is therefore an important one.

In co-opting support for the research project it would be useful to engage staff in the process so they could influence outcomes by choosing a performance management/development approach that best suited them in terms of their work and outcomes they were trying to produce. If staff could see that there may be some benefit for them in terms of improving their leadership, project and financial management skills, this may build interest in being part of this project.

Depending on how the initial review was conducted, staff may be feeling resistant to change [Carlopio 1998]. If I was being perceived as an additional “external
consultant” recruited to do another task and represented more change, then there was potential for compounded resistance to be generated in my direction.

An added issue was performance management and individual development plans. These are systems that have operated within the public sector for a considerable period of time. When the research project commenced, there seemed to be ambivalence on how successful or otherwise this system had been. From the discussions with the Executive Director and Director of the division they advised that:

- Results-driven outcomes were an imperative for the area
- Staff had limited time and resources to allocate to workshops and to participate in the research process
- Staff would have the ability to do some “blue-sky thinking” in terms of implementing a performance management project that would work for them.

To sum up, the organisational cultural and environment issues that surfaced from the opening discussions were: participation and involvement, developing trust, creating ownership, the possibility of a ‘time-poor’ culture and the possibility of dealing with a degree of passive-aggressiveness and resistance from the group given the amount of change that was being experienced in the environment.

The Project Group

The project group was established by the Northern Territory Government in 1978 to provide professional advice in the formulation of resource policy. It holds all the data and information relating to geology, mineral and energy resources of the Northern Territory. The group undertakes a range of scientific enhancement studies aimed at maximising private sector investment. They also support a range of industry-focused programs that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of a scientific framework of the NT. Programs are staffed by multidisciplinary teams of dedicated professionals in Darwin and Alice Springs.
Immediately, this raised a key point for action research. Will the group accept or reject action research? As Reason [1988:13] points out, people who have a positivist predisposition and reject an action research approach are usually “…working as scientists in a traditional mode, or who have been educated within a scientific profession.” It is usually accepted that researchers should keep an “…open mind and have an accepting demeanour in the field” [Charmaz 2006:21]. The question remained however as to whether the group would accept an approach that challenges preconceived ways of doing things, values change, learning and knowledge and is ultimately a subversive process. Or, was this my bias surfacing?

PROJECT DESIGN

Overall Emphasis of Design

The project design was predominantly based on research with, for and by people rather than on people. The methodology used was open-ended and developmental [McNiff and Whitehead 2006:30]. McNiff and Whitehead explain that an action research process often has a life of its own and is more likely to be considered ‘…untidy, haphazard and experimental’ [2006:30]. Given that I would be part of the research, my reactions to the haphazard nature of the process would also be captured. For example how do I respond when we are dealing with uncertainty as opposed to structure? How do I feel when the group may not do what I expect them to do?

As previously mentioned, all action research characteristics provide a researcher with options to choose from in terms of designing their methodology. The features allow the choice from an extensive menu which aid a researcher to select what best suits a given group, workplace and particular problem. The key features selected for this intervention were:
Key Intervention Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Research Feature</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action and reflection</td>
<td>Take action and do what works for the group – contingent approach. Learning through cycles of action and reflection to improve practice. Knowledge emerges and is not forced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Contributes to science. Includes grounded theory as a data gathering method. Aims to contribute to a holistic understanding within the group and the public sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solves a Problem in Real Time</td>
<td>A real practical problem is identified, has some group benefit and is resolved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative</td>
<td>Research work is done collaboratively and interactively. Process shares power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates Change</td>
<td>Change is created for the organisation and the individuals who participate in the research. Challenges existing thinking and is subversive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Exposing</td>
<td>Researcher exposes values and interests to the group and to self. Researcher is part of the research and makes this known to the group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

Action Research and Meta Cycles of Inquiry

When action research and meta cycles of inquiry are taken into account, it is not unusual to expect that the process is untidy. In some respects this is due to the learning and discovery process happening on a number of levels iteratively.
It is interesting to note that even though they describe the process as being untidy, they also describe it as a ‘disciplined systematic process’ [McNiff and Whitehead 2006:9]. The Spirals of Action Research Cycles by Coghlan and Brannick [2005] discussed in Chapter 4, clearly show the iterative nature of the cycles as well as the disciplined approach that can be used by the researcher and group. At different stages the methodology needs to reflect the interaction and changes coming out of the cycle from the group and researcher.

**Spirals of Action Research Cycles**

![Diagram of Spirals of Action Research Cycles](image)

There was also a loose ‘action research plan’ woven into the project design that involved:

- Continually taking stock of what was going on
- Identifying concerns
- Generating different options
- Taking action and trying it out
- Monitoring the action by gathering data to show what was happening
- Evaluating progress [McNiff and Whitehead 2006:8].

**Managing the Group and Managing the Self**

Some of the key concepts underpinning the ‘action research plan’ also encompassed the need to address issues for the project group as well as the researcher. These issues are discussed in Figure 12 below:
These concepts were identified in an attempt to help understand participants, manage the environment and influence key stakeholders. Given that the agency wanted a workplan and terms of reference, action learning/action research principles were built into these documents. An action learning definition is probably best provided by Rothwell [1999:5] who says that:

Action learning is a real-time learning experience that is carried out with two equally important purposes in mind: meeting an organizational need and developing individuals or groups [1999:5].

Rothwell [1999:5] also cites Reg Revans as avoiding trying to define action learning. Rothwell says Revans is:

...more inclined to describe action learning in terms of what it is not. Revans, in effect, holds the view that to try and build finite structures around it....only robs action learning of its power [1999:5].

Overall the framework to implement the project was a model adopted from Rothwell [1999:13]:

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**Figure 12 – Source: Schein [1988:51]**
The foundation beneath each step was an ability to understand the political and strategic environment in which, as a facilitator/researcher, I’d be working in and be able to negotiate a safe path around and in it! In that way I could manage the environment and the project group. Step 5 of the model included drafting questions to help the group to identify and experiment with solutions. These questions included:

1. Can all the issues be solved by the group?
2. What does the monitoring and reporting process need to look like?
3. How can the change management process be managed to best suit individual and organisational needs – was this possible?
4. Do any of the issues identified in the change management process need to be road tested or discussed elsewhere?
5. Were there gaps between what people need to know or do to perform in the new jobs that have been identified in the review?
6. Consequential to no.4 were there learning gaps that needed attention? And how will the learning be measured?
7. Were there communication issues that needed attention?
8. How could the results of the group be evaluated [from an individual and team perspective]?
To improve “ground truth” and examine “current reality” Scott [2002:49] contends that organisations and the people within it should continually question themselves by asking:

What’s changed since last we met?
Where are we succeeding?
Where are we failing?
What have we learned in the last few months?
What is required of us now?
Does the plan still make sense? If not, what needs to change? [2002:49]

Scott [2002:49] suggests that current ontological and epistemological assumptions seem to indicate that perhaps we have stopped asking questions about our systems in terms of what’s working and not working. This was an area that was explored during the methodology process to identify whether we have stopped asking such questions. For example, are systems like performance management producing results or adding value with long term productive outcomes? If not, why not? What needs to change?

If possible, double loop learning questions about deeper governing variables / values would also be asked of the project group to deepen learning.

The overall principles associated with the methodology included: the researcher’s role being a participant and facilitator, not expert; the group owning the issues and solutions generated through planning, action and reflection; creating a commitment to learning and change; the facilitator/researcher using a questioning and challenging approach.

PROJECT PROCESS

There were a number of preparatory issues that needed to be undertaken before commencing the project. These included gaining access, agreement and commitment of the executives within the agency and then from key stakeholders. A work plan was drafted and agreed to with the division’s director which included a timeline to complete the project. After that the process included:
1. Maintaining commitment and buy-in with report backs to executive, management and key stakeholders
2. Conducting “whole group sessions” with Darwin and Alice Springs staff [80+ participants].
3. Holding smaller Focus Group Sessions in Darwin and Alice Springs
4. Using open rather than closed questions as well as asking the same question in different ways
5. Reflections and observations through the report back process with the group
6. Self-reflective writing from the researcher and gaining advice and help with reflections from mentors and critical friends. Critical friends were carefully selected so they would not always agree with me but challenge my assumptions and reactions to the group.
7. Interviews with human resource stakeholders and others across the public sector
8. Disengaging from the group once it became clear that members were no longer committed to the process. Discussing outcomes with the group and the executive directors. Finally, evaluating findings with the directors of the project group.

To aid in clarifying issues for the group and myself prior to starting the project, I created a general checklist of areas that may need attention depending on the interactions taking place with the group. The checklist included:
## PROJECT CHECKLIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Consulting Process</th>
<th>Understanding the client needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarity and use of action learning principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding how to ‘add value’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being clear about roles i.e. researcher is not an ‘expert’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Consulting Skills</td>
<td>Understanding my ‘buttons’, my strengths and weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing effective consulting knowledge/techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Measuring and boosting my ‘emotional intelligence’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting the Initial Meetings</td>
<td>Establishing credibility and professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing/handling initial meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Developing highly effective questions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practising effective active listening techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting Tools &amp; Techniques</td>
<td>Understanding how to involve the group in identifying solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using professional consulting tools to assist with questions to diagnose issues i.e. SWOT, Organisational Health Checks etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using models as powerful communication tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Gathering</td>
<td>The Review Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any other documentation that would help identify critical issues for the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Change</td>
<td>Overcoming inertia and building momentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helping when the group was resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing with internal politics / and broader environment issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Action Planning</td>
<td>Using a Personal Development Workbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing my own action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building my personal networks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

Within a general framework, such a checklist was used throughout the process and also used as a tool to guide the approach.
Careful Planning and Establishing Rigour

Although an overall framework was in place, an area that was initially neglected was the step-by-step specific and disciplined method of capturing the data. The need to pre-plan events, record outcomes from meetings and have a formal reflection process in place aided by mentors and critical friends was happening haphazardly.

Even in the very early stages of the project it was clear that changes needed to be made to the project process. Working with the whole group of 80+ staff was unwieldy and did not aid the process other than to let the whole group know what was happening and how it was happening. Therefore it was agreed that the focus would be on working with the management group rather than the whole group.

After these first initial meetings with the whole group it became apparent that there was a need to put a disciplined thinking and reflection approach in place. At the most basic level, Reason [1988:146] explains his process of action inquiry as spending:

...approximately an hour a day recording the day’s events and reflecting on them. Prior to work I would tape my intentions on some of the day’s scheduled meetings, at times brainstorming on different approaches and rehearsing one or another. After work I would make notes and/or tape on the day’s meetings and conversations – using the processes of the sociological field-work researcher. I kept a daily appointment book which served to summarize all events and became an index to the tapes. I taped during my drive to work and home...[1988:146]

Rigour increases in the process because Reason [1988:146] goes on to explain that his daily note taking and tapes provided the background for the more important process of analysis and reflection and then the writing up of ‘critical incidents’ once a week. In this way he was able to reconstruct difficult incidents, gain a greater understanding of perceptions and by using meeting notes recreate the most difficult part of the discussion.
At the same time he would examine his own feelings and look at ways in which he could have approached the problem in a different/better way, particularly when facing a difficult person or situation. To help himself, Reason (1988:147) developed a pyramid of the action inquiry processes to track each stage of the project, improve his recording and reflecting abilities and test it all in a safe environment. A similar approach was adopted to improve planning prior to working with the group as well as improve rigour in analysing the data.

Examining this method of inquiry improved rigour for this project. It also aided in identifying possible gaps and ways to improve the facilitation of meetings, suggest new approaches, generate new questions and group ownership. Very early in the project, four main areas of improvement were commenced in line with this thinking. They were:

1. As far as possible, pre-plan meetings, test in a safe environment and then rehearse and role play approaches to be taken with the group
2. In a disciplined way record and observe meetings, analysing critical incidents on an as-needed basis
3. Improve my own reflection method by holding meetings with mentors/critical friends to obtain feedback about my approach, style,

Pyramid of Action Inquiry

- 5. Publicly test approach
- 4. Rehearse and role play
- 2. Weekly: select a critical incident[s] for analysis and reflect on issues
- 1. Record and observe: reactions, behaviours of the group and my thoughts, feelings reactions.

Figure 14 – Source: adapted from Reason [1988:147]
patterns of thinking and doing that may/may not be producing useful outcomes. Reality testing my reaction and behaviour towards the group.

4. Identifying key stakeholders across the sector with very different thinking and approaches to confirm or disconfirm data assumptions and interpretations.

Such a tactic aided the project because recording the group’s and my reactions to events and then discussing critical incidents with mentors allowed for deeper reflection. It also allowed for the discussion of different options, gave permission for periods of silence in group sessions without feeling uncomfortable and/or allowed me to rehearse a number of different approaches that could be used with people who felt resistant. A central feature that was identified during this process was the capacity of a facilitator to bring forth from a mental toolbox a variety of approaches that could be drawn from when needed! It is however important to acknowledge that no amount of planning accounted for everything that happened with the project group. It just meant that as a fledging researcher you felt a bit more prepared. The need for flexibility and an ability to deal with uncertainty remained an ever present factor.

**Participatory Structures**

Due to the competing agendas within the whole group, the difficulty of managing 80+ employees and insufficient resources the research project targeted the management group. However, there were report back sessions with the whole group to keep them informed of developments. It was envisaged that the smaller more influential group could participate more fully in every phase of the research and hopefully increase ownership [Herr and Anderson 2005:94].

Agreed arrangements included meetings, meeting notes, the researcher being a participant of the process, ad hoc meetings, phone meetings, **emails** and focus groups.
Researcher as Participant

In initial meetings with the whole group and the meetings held in Darwin and Alice Springs, it was explained that the researcher is not an expert and did not "have all the answers". The researcher's role was explained as being a participant in the process – just as much as everyone else because I would be learning with the group.

It was also explained that perceiving the facilitator/researcher as an expert would inhibit participation and cooperation: two key principles of the action learning/action research process. Continual adjustments and learning was another key ingredient in the process. Flexible behaviour needed to be displayed by everyone as the project progressed particularly when dealing with cycles of action and reflection. It was also pointed out that there would be periods of uncertainty because events would not be predictable and clear and the group’s input had the potential to aid in limiting uncertainty and identifying creative solutions to their problems [Coghlan and Brannick 2005:11].

"Whole Group” Sessions

These sessions were an annual event for the group. All staff throughout the territory came together to discuss issues, update their knowledge and have presentations on topics of importance. The director invited me to first present the action research project to the group and then explore their views in terms of performance management and progress made on the project. I attended two sessions.

Meetings

The primary way of working with the group was meetings. In the workplan there was an agreed schedule of meetings which of necessity changed as the requirements of the group changed. We then agreed to a series of fortnightly meetings to progress the work of the group as needed. We would discuss what
had happened in previous meetings, evaluate actions and decide what needed to be done by the following meeting.

Meetings were recorded, outcomes distributed by email and data gathered which might help to understand the development of the group’s processes, and aid in my and their learning. During meetings the note taking was kept to a minimum so as not to alarm or concern members that everything that was being said was being taken down verbatim.

Report Back Meetings to Executive

Throughout the project there were several report back meetings with the Executive Directors to provide information on progress and suggest options in dealing with performance management. At one of the most significant meetings held with a number of key executives within the agency Dr Murray Redman accompanied me to affirm the benefits of ‘after action reviews’ as a diverse or new approach to manage performance.

Meeting Notes

It was agreed that I would write the notes arising out of the meetings. I would then email the notes to the division’s director. Often he would ask me to draft an email about the notes so they could be forwarded to the management group in readiness for the next meeting. This meant I did not impose on staff to produce the notes which limited further time being spent on managing the research process.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held: one in Darwin and one in Alice Springs with a cross-section of staff from the territory group. The sessions were held to elicit the views of staff on performance management, what worked and what did not work
in their view and to attempt to generate ‘blue-sky thinking’ to aid in developing a system that best suited them. Staff were selected to aid in the development of the ‘new’ system but many staff were either reluctant to participate or said they were ‘too busy’ to be part of the process.

*Ad hoc meetings*

The process also allowed for ad hoc meetings with the director of the division. During these sessions we discussed the progress of the group and ‘where to from here’. Ad hoc meetings also allowed discussion where anything of significance or concern arose that warranted private discussion. This aided in the director championing the project as well as outcomes for the project.

*Phone/email discussions*

A number of phone calls were generated between the director and researcher to ensure emails were sent out and/or to clarify issues with the group. Emails were generally sent to group members to summarise outcomes from the meetings, confirm meeting dates and agree on outcomes for the following sessions.

*Action Research Cycles of Reflection*

The cycles and spirals of reflection for the researcher were believed to be the most significant part of the research project. Comprehensive and deep reflection from the group was infrequent and often non-existent. The group mainly depended on the notes from the meetings and often voiced the view that they wanted ‘practical outcomes’ to help them to do their work. The ‘results-driven’ and ‘time-poor’ environment frequently overtook a ‘learning’ culture. The researcher formalised reflections by:

- Asking the group to reflect on the previous meeting and discuss learning and outcomes – it was clear the group focussed more on activities than ‘internal’ or group learning.
• Recording observations of the groups’ interactions with each other and with the researcher.

• Discussing these observations with mentors/critical friends, HR practitioners and others across the public sector. Useful insights emanated from these discussions.

• Comparing observations and reflections between the work group I was managing and the project group.

• Reflecting on the meeting notes, discussions with triangulation interviews and HR practitioners and recording these views.

• Returning to reflections to add further thoughts, taking stock of where the project was heading and my position within the research and outcomes being produced.

This approach was taken to deal with the issue of “double burden” associated with action research [Herr and Anderson 2005:5]. Double burden means that a researcher has to address both action and research, that is:

…action [improvement of practice, social change, and the like] and research [creating valid knowledge about practice]. [2005:5].

Increasing Rigour

As the project progressed additional process areas emerged which increased rigour as well as data collection and analysis. These areas included:

1. Comparisons made between the project group and the work group I was managing to use multiple data sources within each reflection cycle.

2. Increased triangulation and focus on areas of agreement and disagreement – discarding information only provided by one person.

3. Triangulation interviews with philosophically different thinkers – two Chief Financial Officers, an Economist and Treasury officials compared with interviews from HR practitioners.

4. The use of two mentors and two critical friends to reality test my reactions and learning and tweak methodology being used.
5. The use of mind mapping to see links and connections across emerging issues and themes.

6. A more specialised literature review was performed towards the end of the research project and to confirm/disconfirm relevant findings.

Data Collection and Assessment

Multiple data sources were used to provide contradictory and confirming interpretations: Structured interviews, reflective discussions with mentors and critical friends, comparing reactions from the project group with the internal group I was managing, interviewing human resource experts within the public sector and finally selecting a small group who demonstrated a very different way of thinking from the researcher to confirm/disconfirm data [two Chief Financial Officers, an economist and two Treasury officials]. The data collection process can be summarised graphically as follows:

Data Collection Process

With the use of Buzan’s [2000] mind-mapping approach it was envisaged that this process would also help to synthesize large amounts of data. Mind-mapping
would aid in the clustering of key issues as they start to emerge and thus help to see pictures and patterns. Wherever possible, I would use pictures and memo-writing to help identify issues or areas of complexity to support the development of ideas and finally to help identify further data-gathering [Charmaz 2006:11]. For example using performance management as the key issue and in trying to determine the group’s reaction, an example of a mind-map is provided below:

**Mind Map Example**

[Image of a mind-map with the following questions:
- Who was open to new ways of doing things? Why?
- What system / culture was operating? Did the system allow openness / trust?
- Were there positive statements and/or nonverbal cues? Ideas generated? Why?
- Who displayed resistance? Why?
- Where was the resistance coming from? Was there history evident?
- Performance Management Systems]

Figure 16 - Source: Buzan [2000]

In this way a process was created that would allow me to understand what creates meaning, what guides and shapes behaviour and to make sense of my actions and the actions of others. In trying to understand another person’s reality I was attempting to identify and describe theories and realities the group would hold and use.

**Insider Status**

In this instance, as the researcher, I was an ‘insider in terms of being an employee of the public sector but an ‘outsider’ as far as having no specialist skills or knowledge of the type of work carried out by the group. Discussion of the
impact of my insider/outsider status and the advantages and disadvantages identified above is mentioned during the methodology chapter.

For all intents and purposes however, I was an insider of the public sector and everyone involved in the project knew this. The significance of having insider status was not initially apparent to me. As the project progressed it seems that I probably did stop asking the indepth type of questions that needed to be asked of the project group. This issue is explored in more detail in the Evaluation Chapter.

TESTING AND EVOLVING THEORY

Reason [1988:166] confirms that the project design had validity in terms of rigour. He explains the process of rigour as including iterative elements and that there is a “…to-and-fro process which provides the basis for testing and evolving theory”. His graphic below shows how he undertook this process which was similar to the method to be used with this project. He discusses the process in this way:

…I have, for instance, thought of ideas from my experience [experiential research], talked with others about them [dialogic research] and tested and developed them in action [action research]. I have also simultaneously drawn upon written material, and published papers myself [contextual locating]. [1988:166]

Other than contextual locating, at this point the process was similar to that used by this researcher.

![Testing and Evolving Theory Diagram](image)

Figure 17 - Source: Reason [1988:166]
Dealing with Values

Herr and Anderson [2005:4] confirm that:

Like all forms of inquiry, action research is value laden. ...Action research takes place in settings that reflect a society characterized by conflicting values and unequal distribution of resources and power. [2005:4]

Hence the use of triangulation interviews, discussions with mentors as well as critical friends to determine whether my values were suppressing the emergence of data from a variety of sources. This does not mean that I had no influence over the project or what I did or did not do. It was about limiting, as far as possible, the influence of my perceptions and values on research outcomes.

GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory principles were used with this research project. In that regard as the cycles of observation, reflection, action and evaluation took place, so too did the collection of data and the analysis of that data. Mind maps and the use of codes and categories from the data underpinned the approach, as did constant comparisons of the emerging information. Memo-writing and sampling aimed at theory construction was then utilised.

It is important to emphasise that as much as possible the process was flexible and emergent and rules, regulations, prescriptions and packages were not used other than checklists and planning. Hunches about categories were checked, properties in each category saturated and relationships clarified as they emerged between categories.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided information about the project's background, how entry was gained and the group and research topic identified. The main
organisational, environmental and cultural factors were also discussed. The key intervention features of the action research approach used as well as the action research and meta cycles of inquiry were acknowledged. Attempts to address rigour as well as limit the values and perceptions of the researcher were addressed. The process used triangulation interviews, mentors, critical friends, mind maps and grounded theory principles. Data was constantly collected and analysed iteratively as theory was tested and evolved.
CHAPTER 6
PROJECT IN ACTION
Chapter 6:

- Discusses what emerged as the project was put into action.
- Explains how participatory structures aided in changing the direction and focus of the project.
- Attempts to recreate the reactions of researcher, divisional staff [whole group] and management project group.
- Examines the role of mentors and critical friends.
- Describes the apparent failure to achieve action learning reflection practices and/or solve a real problem.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter details what happened when the project was put into action. It provides an overall chronology of the participatory structures and how participation aided in a change of direction and focus. Reactions of the division’s staff and the management project group are described, what emerged from participatory events and why the project continued for two-and-a-half years. It pieces together the events in terms of a story and questions whether outcomes generated were useful to the project group. It outlines the attempts to help generate action learning reflective practices in order to solve a real problem for the group. Details are also provided about what I did as the researcher, where I obtained support and advice to help improve and continue the process.
OVERALL CHRONOLOGY

The figure below provides an overall project chronology. In many ways this figure is one-dimensional. For example, interspersed among these main events were meetings with mentors, critical friends, coffee meetings with the Director of the Group, adjustments to the process, planning, reflecting and dealing with personal issues like the loss of my father. Most of these events are described below. Personal events are not captured but are mentioned to explain that often we are unaware of significant events impacting on one another. The chronology identifies the length of time it took to initiate and commence the project and how and why the project changed direction and focus. It traces the reactions of the divisional staff [referred to as the whole group] and the project group [which was the management team].

Overall Project Chronology

Figure 18
A chronology summarising the dates associated with this process is at Appendix 5.

The sections below examine in more detail what happened during:

- initiation meetings;
- explaining action learning principles;
- Whole Group Session 1 which was feedback and reactions from staff in Darwin and Alice Springs;
- first Executive report back;
- Whole Group Session 2;
- After Action Review [AAR] sessions with the management project group;
- reflective discussions with the Director of the group;
- reflections with mentors and critical friends; and
- the final report back sessions to the Executive and project group.

Initiation Meetings

The meeting with the organisation’s Chief Executive took place early in mid 2004. It was another month of negotiation before the meeting with the Executive Director, the Director’s Division and HR Manager took place. Both meetings were initial discussions about what an intervention could look like and to introduce me to the Director of the Division. No informal contacts were made. A couple of meetings were cancelled because executives were frenetically trying to do their work in a very busy environment [Herr and Anderson 2003:92].

It took a series of six meetings later in 2004 with the HR Manager and the Director of the Division before the intervention commenced. At those meetings discussion centred on the parameters of the project, my role, the extent of support from them and how the whole intervention could add value in attempting to solve a real problem. Topics ranged from fact finding, to exploring roles, to
conversatio about defining action learning to the identification of a project. Some of the dialogue covered the following areas:

**Example of Questions at Initiation Meetings**

- How did the review impact on staff? What was their reaction to the changes?
- How will this intervention be perceived?
- What is everyone's role: mine, yours, the project groups? What level of support can be expected?
- Action learning was the preferred methodology. Do you have any questions/concerns about such an approach?

Figure 19

**Explaining Action Learning**

At the initial meetings action learning was explored to the extent that I was not an expert, that it was participatory, that there would be reflective cycles and plans of action and then repetitive cycles of reflection, that it was an unstructured approach that was often intangible and that everyone would be encouraged to speak up.

In explaining action learning to the HR Manager and Director and later with the greater and project groups the issues discussed in Figure 20 were raised:
In retrospect action learning is probably not an approach that sits comfortably with a risk-averse environment. This may have contributed to the length of time it took to gain support for the identification of a project and the intervention commencing. However, the Executive were extremely busy which also contributed to time delays.

Perhaps some of their reluctance and reservations were masked by my excitement and apprehension at starting such a project. There is no doubt there was hesitation yet the performance management project proceeded after producing a letter and structured work plan [see Appendix 1 and 2]. Information ‘coffee meetings’ with the group’s Director aided in building rapport. Often the discussion was about general issues and getting to know one another.
Reactions of the Whole Group

In late 2004, the Director sent out an email to all staff advising that I was assisting with implementation of the review. He pointed out that I was not an expert and that we were all co-researchers who owned and would self-manage the process. He also explained that we would soon meet with Alice Springs staff and Darwin staff. After that advice, I sent out an email saying I would explain action learning, give background to the project and aid the group in developing something useful in terms of performance management. When talking to the groups not only did the action learning issues in Figure 20 above get raised, but also how the process:

- Forces us to look at our values.
- Creates the capacity to allow us to reflect on ourselves.
- Places emphasis on what we don’t know because the whole group can help to answer questions to address problems.

Much of this information was met with silence from the groups in Alice Springs and Darwin! I went on to explain my values, the process, project aim, what could happen and the building of relationship:

Explanation of Research Project & Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Values</th>
<th>Open agendas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admit my own limitations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Not an expert with all the answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need the group’s help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process is uncovering a problem and developing an approach to the problem and then seeing if it will work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not much structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning was at the core of the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What was the aim of the project?

- Help to solve a real problem.
- Gain their ownership and help with the project.
- Reflect on our own actions, reactions and learn.

What could happen?

- Learn together to handle change
- Learn whether we’re comfortable with change and uncertainty

Overall relationship aim

- Open and honest discussions that lead to developing trust and aid in solving something of importance for the group.

All of this was met with more silence from the group as well as discomfort. No eye contact, some wriggles in chairs and some left the room. When I asked if there were any questions about the information there was silence. Someone said: no, no everything is fine! Yet there was a hint of cynicism in the voice.

The action learning and reflection approach, the importance of questioning appropriately and being mindful of our own biases and agendas was discussed. When the group was invited to contribute information about their biases and their agendas the responses seemed defensive:

"We understand action learning and we do it all the time."

"We just want a performance management system that will provide us with the professional and technical skills development we need."

"We don’t see the importance of generic skills."

As these were the initial meetings there were feelings of apprehension on my part. One question that kept arising was: To what extent can you capture the good will of people to become part of a process when they do not appear to be interested in it? Using a mind map, the concerns were first plotted like this:

Table 12
Mind Map of Initial Concerns

Whole Group Session 1

This is an event that is held once a year. All divisional staff get together to update their knowledge on issues, listen to speakers, and participate in professional development opportunities as a group. I was invited to report back to the whole group about team and individual capability plans [or the ‘new’ performance management approach].

Prior to the “whole group session” and after the separate discussions with the Alice Springs and Darwin groups, I had a reflective discussion with the Director of the Division. From the staff’s reaction, he said that trying to select a small group to develop a performance management system did not look like it would work. He agreed with me that people in Darwin and Alice Springs appeared to be very reluctant participants and that ownership was limited. My disappointment was obvious. In some respects I felt personally responsible for their lack of
ownership. The Director mentioned that in his view the constant pace of change and the extent of the nature of the work probably also contributed to lack of enthusiasm about being part of the project. The response from staff was:

“We’re too busy.”

“We have none or few resources to invest in such an approach.”

“We want you to develop something that allows us to improve our personal and professional skills.”

The outcome from the meeting with the Director was that I would provide feedback at the “whole group session” being held early in 2005 and that we would decide how to proceed after that. I developed a presentation about team and individual capability plans and the key issues discussed were:

- Providing feedback from the Alice Springs and Darwin sessions
- Outlining the process for team and individual capability plans
- Identifying why some systems fail and others don’t and the ‘readiness’ ingredients to implement a good system
- Identifying the key elements required in designing a team self-management approach
- Ensuring congruency between work systems, workflows, job design and job layout.

The whole group’s resistance seemed even more tangible than the separate meetings held in Darwin and Alice Springs. Resistance indicators were their comments, body language and lack of engagement of the topic. They seemed to be struggling with the notion of change and thinking and doing things differently. They were unable to generate any new ideas or come up with any blue-sky thinking. At the same time they were clearly resistant to any new ‘system’ being implemented.
Self interest in terms of personal and professional development seemed paramount. They at no point asked: What is my responsibility here? There did not appear to be any questioning on their part about what was the right thing to do in relation to the whole group. It was as if they were only interested in themselves. Had their reliance on the bureaucracy demoralised them and/or compromised their ability to improvise and be flexible?

There was probably quite a bit of frustration on both sides: mine and theirs. The expectation on my part was there would be a greater level of creativity and a willingness to participate in a process aimed to help them – after all most were/are professional people. Now was this a realistic assumption and/or expectation!? After the event, feedback provided by managers, was that the presentation was perceived as being too theoretical and not very practical for the group. The ideas and concepts seemed to be dismissed by the group out of hand.

My frustration probably transmitted itself during the whole group session. Questions and options probably dried-up and defensive behaviours became apparent on both sides. After the event, when I was debriefing with one of my critical friends they said:

"Stop worrying…you know Fred Emery says it's all data even if it's negative!"

Several issues that emerged from this event included:

- The need to detach and put yourself in the shoes of the people listening to the presentation.
- The use of processes and strategies that help the self and the group to become ‘unstuck’.
- Being comfortable with silence and allowing people time and space to think.
- Displaying patience for the self and others.
This raised the question as to whether: **I supported the group in the struggle to find the answer or did I give them the answer?** In the personal learning and reflections chapter, such issues are explored further. Examples of discussions with mentors and critical friends is at Appendix 6.

An interstate “whole group session” presenter suggested that the performance management approach used by their organisation may be a useful benchmark for the group. This option was explored with the presenter and then the project group however it turned out to be the stock standard approach. It was also linked to competency pay increases – a notion that was not acceptable in this public sector [see model at Appendix 9].

After the “whole group session” several reflective meetings were held with the Director. Due to the lack of interest, it was agreed that I develop a stock standard performance management approach for the group. During the reflective meetings my dissatisfaction with the process and the delivery of something that would not help the group to change and reflect on their behaviour or their approach to work, convinced the Director that we should report these issues back to the Executive.

In the meantime, two report back meetings were held with the Director’s management group to discuss and finalise the stock standard performance management system. It was a surreal process, going through the motions and developing something that I knew would not produce any positive outcomes for the group in the long-run. It would have been interesting to see what the reaction would have been from the Director and the management group if, at this meeting, I challenged the group about their conflicted and confused views on performance management. On one hand they said it did not add value yet on the other they wanted to perpetuate the system! I could also have challenged them by saying:

No, I won’t do it. It’s up to the group to be part of the process. If you’re reluctant to be part of the process you’re demonstrating a lack of interest in it and in the long run it isn’t going to work given your views that the process does not work!
The undiscussables were made discussable with the Director but were not extended to the management/project group. My agenda was open with him and he made it clear that he understood the consequences and the lack of any change for the group. In retrospect it was a missed opportunity and a shame that the undiscussables were not dealt with in the management/project group too.

From the reflective discussions with the Director it was clear that he could see the group’s defensiveness, the lack of ‘buy-in’, the lack of flexibility and blue sky-thinking. We were also able to discuss unrealistic expectations on both sides.

At this point the decision making process was one of first the Executives determining what the project would be – a top-down approach. Then discussions would take place with the Division’s Director, his agreement would be gained and then feedback and discussion would take place with the project group to work through alternatives for the future. Perhaps this approach reinforced the hierarchical and bureaucratic way of doing things!

**Management/Project Group Report Back Meeting – May 2005**

A presentation was developed to remind the group of the issues arising out of the Darwin and Alice Springs meetings, feedback discussions and the report to the “whole group session” in February 2005.

Discussions centred on how in many ways performance management seemed disconnected from the organisation and people. For example, the division’s staff provided feedback that they wanted to develop skills that were important to them professionally rather than meet the organisation’s needs. There was also disconnect in terms of business plans and because it may happen once or twice a year, there was no link to the real world of work and what happens daily/weekly. The management/project group again expressed the view that they
did not want just another tick box system, rather something supportive and meaningful. Some of the questions raised in discussions were:

**Questioning the Project Group**

- Are you ready to implement a new approach?
- Are your work systems and workflows operating well?
- What was the current leadership style operating? Would it help or hinder a new way of working?
- Is there a professional development budget available? Will you invest time to make it work?
- Are you ready to commit to implementing a supportive meaningful approach to performance management? And what should it look like?

![Figure 22](image)

At the end of the discussion, the group agreed to team and individual development plans based on a model from the “whole group session” presenter’s interstate organisation. However the link to competency pay increases was removed. As discussed a template was developed and provided to one of the managers to pilot with her group. Overall, it did not seem to be a useful way of dealing with performance issues in the division. Yet the group could not make this connection.

**First Executive Report Back**

The first report back to the full Executive took place early in December 2005. The presentation was carefully crafted and discussed a number of times with the Director of the Group. He was extremely helpful and aided in terms of advice, the use of language in the presentation and putting a different ‘spin’ on issues so that it was not perceived as criticism being solely directed to the group. In his
view, there was a greater dilemma, in that the issue of performance was a systemic and quite deep problem for the whole public sector, not just his division.

In an ‘ideas generation’ meeting with the Director we explored the notion of identifying new ways of discussing and improving performance for individuals and the division. The Director agreed and proposed we ‘sell’ the notion of a new approach to the Executive. To aid this process, I gained the support of Dr Murray Redman to attend the session as I knew he had considerable standing with the Executive Director and may help in persuading him to adopt an After Action Review as a new approach. The Executive feedback presentation session had the following messages contained in it:

**Executive Report Back Presentation**

| Background                  | The review and restructure.                  |
|                            | Death of previous agency and birth of the new one. |
|                            | Priorities Review for the whole agency.       |
|                            | High staff turnover for the division.         |
| Process so far.....         | Gaining of corporate sponsor and project identification |
|                            | Building relationships                        |
|                            | Consulting with Darwin and Alice Staff and “whole group session” feedback |
|                            | Geoscience Australia performance management approach |
|                            | Management Group consultations and piloting PDP process. |
| Staff Feedback about       | Lip Service and Tick-a-box                   |
| Performance Management     | Focus is on filling in a form                |
|                            | Feedback and timing is disconnected           |
|                            | Inadequate or unfair rewards                 |
|                            | System delivers very little in the long run.  |
Organisational Environment and People Factors

- Need outcomes – time is scarce so just give me the answer
- Idea generation and blue-sky thinking can be difficult
- Leadership is solutions focused
- Decision-making can be difficult in a risk averse conservative environment.
- Perceptions and behaviour to change was one of fear, cynicism, anger, resentment and resistance.

Implications for the organisation

- How do we get people to embrace change as a normal way of doing business?
- How do we get people to move beyond fear to challenge tradition and look for better ways of doing things?
- What do we have in place to help create self-awareness?
- If there is no trust operating, it has the potential to create unhealthy and unproductive relationships.

Table 13

The complete Executive presentation is at Appendix 8. It was suggested to the Executive that other ways of improving performance needed to be considered particularly if the organisation wanted:

- To embed values to change behaviour
- People to be self-managing, show initiative and leadership
- To improve individual and organisational performance.

After Action Reviews [AARs] was mentioned as a possible option. AARs are a structured review or debrief process that allows groups to analyze what happened, why it happened and how it can be done better. A project does not need to be complete to undertake an AAR. Reviews can be undertaken at any stage such as a major event or project phase. This approach is said to be used successfully by the US army and can be instrumental in learning for individuals and the organisation because it encourages participants to share information so as to continuously improve. It has been found to be particularly useful in change environments.
Later in the process an unsourced quote attributed to Peter Senge would come back to haunt the process and me:

The Army’s After Action Review [AAR] is arguably one of the most successful organizational learning methods yet devised. Yet, most every corporate effort to graft this truly innovative practice into their culture has failed because, again and again, people reduce the living practice of AAR’s to a sterile technique.

Nevertheless, the reaction from the HR people [who had been invited to attend the report back session] was very interesting. They had great difficulty in accepting that the performance management system as it stood was not producing outcomes that were useful either in the short or long run to individuals or the organisation. The struggle was evident on their faces and body language. One HR consultant became openly hostile challenging the notion of AARs. A number of times the interjections and explanations of Dr Redman and the Executive Director was the only intervention that helped her to stop and think that perhaps there was another way of aiding performance. It is unclear that there was any level of acceptance or understanding beyond the meeting.

Issues of power, control, vested interests and expectations seemed evident within the mix of reactions. HR people clearly had vested interests in maintaining the status quo and maintaining a performance management system – even if it did not work! Executive debate seemed to clearly indicate that they wanted change and understood the challenge in trying to improve performance and introduce something new that would replace a system that had produced little or no value. What was also clear was that the translation of the need for change and a sense of urgency to improve performance had not transferred itself down the line to the troops! The Executive gave their approval and support to trial AARs with the management/project group. However, members of the management/project group were not present at this meeting.
“Whole Group Session” 2

The report back to the whole group about project progress was similar to the Executive presentation. It also reflected back personal learning that had occurred for me in terms of:

- Not liking change.
- Acknowledging that we need some level of discomfort or change will not happen within.
- The fear of starting something new, looking foolish and failing.
- Self-awareness aiding in limiting externalisation of problems.
- The importance of trust in performance and developing good working relationships.

The presentation also included the need to identify our values as opposed to the organisation’s values to see whether there were gaps and how that could play itself out in organisational life. This issue was followed up with a ‘values’ exercise for “whole group session” participants. Summarised staff responses included:
Such comments seemed to demonstrate an external locus of control and wanting others to generate solutions, provide answers and to just ‘fix it’. Leadership did not appear to be evident. The importance of keeping an open mind and the ability to use critical thinking skills did not appear to be on display. What was evident was dysfunctional behaviour like: aggression, pettiness, negativity and cynicism. The importance of playing with ideas and generating new approaches seemed to be beyond the group – in part this seemed to be due to being burnt out by an accumulation of change and different consultants and reviews.

Therefore the struggle continued for the whole group and within me. Not only was their resistance on display but so was their intolerance and openness to learning – unless it was on their terms. They did not appear to be looking for opportunities to add value, to influence or show respect for themselves and others. The group seemed to be looking for opportunities to complain, whinge,
blame rather than come up with suggestions and solutions. Honesty, kindness and courage did not appear to be valued qualities. After this event, advice was again sought from mentors, critical friends and triangulation discussions with others across the public sector [see Appendix 6 and 7]:

**Questions to Mentors, Critical Friends & Triangulation Discussions**

- What are the effects of working in a bureaucracy? In the long term does it produce dysfunction in people?
- Environmentally, does reliance on rules and regulations aid in preventing us from thinking? Had we lost our ability to improvise?
- Have we given up on influencing our environment, making mistakes, and/or showing leadership?
- Do we no longer trust or have confidence in one another, hence our reliance on rules and regulations?
- Has our moral compass been eroded?

![Figure 24](image)

Nevertheless, the Director was still keen for me to work with his management group. In particular, he wanted me to concentrate on values, team management and project management: areas of improvement he saw the group needed. He asked me to start work at the end of April and to make sure we briefed the Chief Executive on the approach and outcomes.

**After Action Review Sessions**

The work commitments of both the Director of the Division and myself prevented the agreed planning session taking place until much later in 2006 to use AARs. These delays probably caused a loss in impetus and ownership of issues.
The Director reminded the management/project group of issues raised at previous “whole group sessions” including:

- Organisations being keen on quick-fix solutions
- Having a busy culture and not conducting the planning sessions or having the discussions we need to have
- Not giving feedback in an appropriate or timely manner and/or avoiding conflict with others.

Given these issues the questions posed to the management/project group were: How did they want to take responsibility because they were a new group? How did they want to use AARs so the process would be practical and useful to them? Also the new Chief Executive had distributed clear values and behaviours he wanted staff to display in the workplace – What was the group’s response to these values? The three key areas identified by the management/project group to be worked on were:

**Team Management**

Undertaking a Belbin team role exercise to identify different styles within the group, improve communication, limit assumptions and reduce misunderstanding. It was agreed that a “blame/whinging” culture cannot thrive in such an environment!

**Values**

Identifying the values that the management team could not live without. This would be done by selecting 3-4 values already operating in the agency to build on within the group itself and sub-groups. They identified that the areas of greatest interest were: leadership, flexibility, self-management, honesty and that four letter word trust.

**Project Management**

Discussion on what’s working and what isn’t to improve the process for the group and the sub-groups of the division.
Team Management

The Belbin was probably one success – depending on your definition of success! The group seemed to engage with the process and were interested to know what styles and approaches each member of the management group had and how that could impact on work and people. Strengths and weaknesses of each member were teased out. Gaps were explored within the group and what they needed to be mindful of and why. At the time, they had an overabundance of team workers and there was some discussion about how they reacted to implementers who could be inflexible and unresponsive to speculative ‘airy-fairy’ ideas that do not have a visible immediate bearing to task at hand. Hence there was a link to personalities, behaviours and undertaking project work.

One implementer repeatedly raised with me [but not to the management/project group] the statements raised in Figure 25:

Feedback to Researcher

"You know this whole process has not been very helpful."
"It's just not useful or practical with the work we need to do."
"In fact, it's a waste of time and I've got a lot of work to do back at the office!"

One way of dealing with the issue was to bring it to the attention of the whole group to ensure agendas were on the table. But again this did not happen.
Nevertheless we pressed on because if nothing else it gave the team a language to conduct discussions that they may want to have at a later date or provide some insight into why a member may be reacting in the way they were. A summary of the Belbin Profile for the group is at Appendix 10.

Values

The group also seemed keen in participating in the values exercise and deciding on non-negotiable values. What was particularly interesting was the values they described as ones they could not live without, and were non-negotiable, did not seem to connect with their behaviour and actions. Yet they were unaware of this difference and what they were saying and what they were doing did not match up! These values were discussed as being:

**Non-Negotiable Values for the Management Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Be open-minded</td>
<td>• Negotiate on acceptable solutions and workloads</td>
<td>• Have a broader view than just the division.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Value others' opinions</td>
<td>• Be supportive and mentor others</td>
<td>• Display leadership at all levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make no assumptions</td>
<td>• Create trust and honesty - no game playing</td>
<td>• No surprises for the Director and Management team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be aware of your own prejudices</td>
<td>• Don't blame and whinge</td>
<td>• Look for community benefit in everything we do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be flexible</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Always look for ways of doing things better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be approachable - have an open door policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The group was left with the task of identifying and linking their values with those identified for the greater organisation. They then needed to distribute the values and embed them with staff. They seemed keen to do this.
Project Management

The discussion centred on the need to identify the project management approach being used for teams and individuals, the risk management approach, the review process and ultimately:

- What was working and what wasn’t
- Whether they were adding value and limiting risks
- How well they were working together.

From a practical perspective, project management was discussed in terms of risk, quality, cost and time, the tools needed to keep on task, the causes of most problems, classic pressure points, how to manage your own time and pressure from clients and developing a project policy framework. A project team check list was also discussed and given to the group.

The final meeting with the management/project group was held late in 2006. The report back on team management, values and project management was discussed. They agreed that they would get back to me early in January 2007 but never did. That’s when the project ended.

Reflective Discussions with Director of Group

Discussions with the Director were the glue that held the whole process together. He was keen to try and get the group to change and he seemed to understand the need to think and do things differently. However with the lack of ownership, time pressures and environmental factors it is unclear whether we were successful.
Mentors & Critical Friends

Mentors and critical friends were extremely useful to the project when it was put into action. They gave me the support needed to see where I could improve and insights into why the group may be reacting in the way they were. They also aided in providing advice in terms of strategies and tools to do things differently. Without them it is unclear whether even the small inroads made would have been achieved.

My reflection practices and understanding of the self grew with the knowledge. They also helped me in understanding my values – so by including them the process became values-exposing at a deeper level not just superficial. They also helped me to challenge the group to the extent I was able to at the time. There is a question mark about whether the challenging should have been greater than what it was.

Final Executive and Project Group Report Back Sessions

A small report back meeting was held with the Chief Executive, Executive Director and Director of the Division late in 2006. The outcomes from the AAR sessions with the management/project group were discussed. Specific feedback from the project group was given to the Chief Executive and Executive Director in terms of the organisational values not being embedded in the work environment. The management/project group advised that given their lack of involvement in developing the values, they were having great difficulty in accepting them. This information was met with great defensiveness and unhappiness by the then Chief Executive.

Feedback was also provided to the Chief Executive that staff were resistant to the values being mandatorily installed as screen saver messages on everyone’s computer. It seemed at the time he wanted to shoot the messenger rather than see that the greater problem that existed was the process used to develop the values in his organisation had not worked.
This was the last time we met as a group.

**SUMMARY**

This chapter identified the overall chronology and main events when the project was put into action. It outlines the steps and stages over a two and a half year period. Action learning and reflective practices struggled to become important or to embed themselves with the group. Ownership was low and blame and whinging was probably high. The bureaucratic culture probably contributed to some extent to limit thinking and displaying negative behaviours in the workplace.

Mentors and critical friends were a very useful part of the process in improving the reflective practices of the researcher and in understanding the group[s] during the process.
CHAPTER 7
LOCAL EMERGING THEORY
Chapter 7:

- Confirms that the methodology aimed to produce theoretical outcomes.
- Discusses the key issues that emerged for the group, the organisation and individuals as a result of taking action on a problem.
- Identifies the patterns and themes that emerged.
- Explains that many diagrams and mind maps were produced to identify the interrelationships among concepts as they kept arising from the research process.
- Demonstrates that local theory was developed from the research and was firmly grounded in data.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter confirms that the methodology did produce theoretical outcomes. It provides details of the issues that emerged for the organisation, the group and individuals and the themes that emerged during the process. Local theory was firmly grounded in data as part of the research process. By way of introduction an explanation is given of how theory was developed during the project – the highs and the lows, the messiness and the creativity, the difficulties and the excitement.
HOW ISSUES EMERGED

In all its nuances and intricacies, Mintzberg [in Smith & Hitt 2005:355] explains the process of identifying emergent concepts and then theory. As he describes the process, he uses humour, reflection and stories to show the connections and disconnections that are needed along the journey. He describes theory development as a continuum of creativity and structure. He says researchers prevaricate between creativity and structure and when and how it happens cannot be predicted. He also describes the creative process, something that is difficult to talk about, in such a way that he builds a picture in the mind of the reader. In fact he quotes Aristotle as saying that: ‘The soul….never thinks without a picture’ [2005:363].

The theory development process used in this project was very similar to that discussed by Minzberg [in Smith & Hitt 2005:355]. The project started with an interesting question: does performance management work in the public sector? Much rich data and tangible thick description was collected and many outlines and frameworks drafted, discarded and redrafted. Little bits of paper with notes of issues that needed to be followed up, or insights that came in the middle of the night, or reflections and comments from mentors and the group were faithfully and carefully collected. Often the purpose for collecting some of the information seemed tenuous to say the least but as the process progressed it turned out to be a key part of the jigsaw puzzle.

Many diagrams and mind maps of all shapes and sizes were produced to start to see the interrelationships among concepts as they kept arising. It was messy and there were times when you felt you were taking one step forward and several back! Faith was tested in trying to suspend judgement and belief that such an intangible approach would work as you went backwards and forwards between tangible and intangible information, amended outlines, collecting rich data, carefully recording observations and, at times, the overwhelming complexity of coding and making sense of a lot of information. Then it was trying to confirm and disconfirm issues, digging out more data, more stories and trying to step back to make sense of it all.
A summarised mind map of how the process commenced is set out below to try and recreate the messiness and creativity. To show the full extent of the conceptual nature and messiness of the process, a series of mind maps are at Appendix 4 to 4.4. Through the progression of mind maps the data was first synthesised, then key issues started to emerge and finally the development of themes and theories developed.

Example of One of the First Mind Maps Synthesizing Data

Figure 27
HOW LOCAL THEORY EMERGED

Mintzberg [in Smith & Hitt 2005:367] offers pearls of wisdom about the importance of cherishing anomalies and dealing with ambiguity because anomalies can be the glue that weaves it all together. He suggests that all the notes should be cherished and to continually return to them to ask: why? why? why? He says anomalies ‘…help with the creative leap’ and warns against dismissing them. He also explains that:

‘…theory development is really about discovering patterns …recognising similarities in things that appear dissimilar to others, i.e., making unexpected connections.’ [2005:369]

In drawing mind maps and pictures of the stories and the literature, patterns started to emerge and links to other issues materialized. That was when the anomalies were clearly evident and that was how the connections were made: some expected and some unexpected.

Above all, the purpose of theory development in this research project has been an attempt to stimulate some thinking about why we go about perpetuating systems like performance management when they seem not to add value. Hence, our apparent reluctance to ask the question: do we want to continue what we are doing or do we want to do things differently? Depending on the answer, we may then want to take some action.

This chapter therefore identifies a number of theories arising out of the links, connections and the relationships between people, systems and structures. It was not possible to examine performance management in isolation. How it impacts and relates to other parts of the organisation and the flow-on effect to people, systems and structures also surfaced during the process.

As Mintzberg [in Smith & Hitt 2005:355] points out, we cannot be objective in theory development. This means that the emerging theory was in many respects influenced by my expectations and biases. The methodology attempted to limit these expectations and bias as far as possible by:
1 In a disciplined way, recording and observing meetings, analysing critical incidents as needed

2 Comparing the external project group with the group I was managing – to clarify the difference - to use multiple data sources within each reflection cycle

3 Focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement and holding triangulation interviews with philosophically different thinkers – two Chief Financial Officers, an Economist and Treasury officials and cross-referencing data from interviews with HR practitioners.

4 Improving my own reflection method by holding meetings with mentors and critical friends to reality test my reactions and learning and redirect the methodology being used.

5 Using mind mapping and pictures to see links and connections across emerging issues and the identification of themes. These themes are discussed in detail below.

It is important to point out that as issues emerged there were often overlaps and connections between the environment, the organisation, the group and individuals working in the division. What was apparent was there were no absolute clear separation between the issues. The two final mind maps identified the key issues that emerged for the group, the organisation and individuals and then the themes that led to theory development. A summarised version is provided below. As previously discussed a sample series of mind maps demonstrating the progression of emergent issues and theory is at Appendix 4 to 4.4.
ISSUES THAT EMERGED FOR THE GROUP, ORGANISATION AND INDIVIDUALS

[no clear separations - there are overlaps and connections]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>ORGANISATION</th>
<th>INDIVIDUALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of work</td>
<td>Constant change and restructures</td>
<td>Inhibited experimentation, thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>New rules</td>
<td>and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Power Control Vested Interests</td>
<td>Lack of leadership and initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration and</td>
<td>Mixed Messages</td>
<td>Unable to change and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment $$$</td>
<td>Culture of Blame</td>
<td>No sense of team, limited sense of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td>belonging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 28

ISSUES THAT EMERGED FOR THE GROUP

Nature of Work

The nature of work of the division was quite unique. It straddled the public and private sector and had links to large multi-national companies. Many of the division’s staff needed to work closely with other organisations inside and outside government.

For example, one imperative was to attract more mining exploration and investment in the Territory from international sources. Staff also needed to be across any ‘new thinking’ in terms of mineral development and exploration methods. Many of the staff were constantly being poached by private organisations with offers of lucrative pay packages, hence a high turnover of staff.

In a sense there were no boundaries as to where work had to be conducted and with whom. Some work was done nationally, other parts of the work agenda was carried out internationally and some out in the field - out bush. Often, the
Minister was accompanied to international overseas events to “sell” Territory mining opportunities to multi-national corporations.

**Capability Issues**

As the research project progressed and more insight was gained into the nature of work for the division, it became apparent that there were a number of areas of capability that needed to be displayed by staff. These capabilities included innovation, leadership, improved performance and an ability to be flexible and open to learning. Executives understood the imperative underlying these capabilities which was one of the reasons for the review that was undertaken of the division and this research project.

**ISSUES THAT EMERGED FOR THE ORGANISATION**

**Environmental Issues**

There was constant change being experienced across the public sector. Consequently these changes were also felt within the department and the division in which the research project was positioned. In the two and half years it took to complete the project, there were three Chief Executive changes, numerous restructures, reorganisations and specific divisions targeted for review.

As previously discussed the project group was one of those divisions which had just been reviewed prior to my commencing the research project with them. What this meant was an ongoing constant need to establish new sets of rules and new relationships. At the same time the project group had to produce results for its Executive and the Minister of the day. It was crucial to attract overseas exploration dollars and investment. The project group was in no doubt that it had to perform on this mandate. Trying to produce results in such an environment, however, created a sense of ‘change fatigue’ for people.
The Impact of Constant Change

As well as having to establish new sets of rules and re-establish new relationships, constant change had a number of significant effects for the group. Bedding down change meant a disintegration and fragmentation of one team and attempts to recreate and relate to a new one. It also meant trying to re-create some sense of corporate identity and belonging. Difficulties were being experienced in creating ownership, responsibility and improving performance. New values developed by the new Chief Executive were not readily being adopted. The mere suggestion that these values would be mandated by placing them on everyone’s computer as a screen-saver was met with massive resistance just within the project group.

The flow-on effect was an increase in power plays, grabs for control and vested interest being exercised. As the need to control the environment increased, the focus was on standardisation and consistency which led to increased rules and regulations. Rules and regulations sent out mixed messages. On the one hand it can be interpreted as: we want a standard approach to risk taking and decision making, we don’t necessarily want you to exercise leadership and innovation. On the other hand, the mandate for the project group and whole group was one of improved performance, leadership and innovation.

In such a change environment it became easier to understand the culture of blame, criticism, whinging and pettiness. What also became evident was the difficulties to build trust, improve dysfunctional behaviours, and bridge areas that were disconnected due to continual restructures.

Many years of change on top of many more years of change in a continuing cycle of attempting to fix problems through restructures, reorganisations and reviews had produced a number of not so ‘nice’ outcomes. These included:
Acceptance of systems that did not work like performance management.

Unable to see the need to do things differently – no open-mindedness.

Non-questioning approach to what was happening around them.

A loss of confidence and trust in the organisation and other people.

Afraid of making mistakes and thus inhibited decision-making.

Limited exploration of alternatives and experimentation.

Difficulty in demonstrating leadership.

Dysfunctional and unhealthy behaviour displayed from staff.

Maintaining status quo and wanting quick-fix short-term solutions.

Busy culture with no reflection or planning opportunities.

Limited feedback and opportunities to discuss the undiscussables.

Blame and whinging culture.

ISSUES THAT EMERGED FOR INDIVIDUALS

The Impact of Constant Change

It seems that the extent and frequency of change meant that the impact on staff was not positive. During the research project the project group and the whole group struggled to do any blue-sky-thinking. They wanted me to take responsibility and deliver a performance management system that they could criticise. They also wanted the system to demonstrate a real commitment to individual professional development but to remain the same as previously existed. There was a very strong “what’s in it for me” message from the project group and whole group.

Constant change seems to have inhibited an individual’s ability to:
• Experiment and be creative
• Feel safe and have opportunities to be sensibly foolish
• Improve performance
• Show leadership abilities in the form of initiative
• Have the conversations that needed to be had
• Create a sense of team and/or corporate identity
• Build a sense of belonging
• Create a responsible, accountable culture of performance.

There was a sense of disconnection between systems and people. There was not any one ‘thing’ that had generated this problem. Rather there were a number of variables that had coalesced to generate dysfunction, a lack of belonging and unhappiness in the work environment.

TENSION BETWEEN ORGANISATION, GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL

A number of real and significant tensions existed between the mandate for the division, the organisation and for individuals. One of these tensions was mentioned earlier in the mixed messages sent out by rules and regulations. Mixed messages also had the ability to increase a lack of trust and disconnection as well as dysfunctional behaviours displayed by staff. Other tensions are discussed below.

Continual change seems to have generated people feeling disconnected from their organisation. Repeatedly trying to recreate a sense of belonging and ownership to their work was frustrating as was demonstrated during discussions with the project group and whole group. Systems that did not work remained intact, like performance management and personal professional development which was disconnected from the organisation. Systems went unquestioned and unchallenged increasing the disconnection and unhappiness. Resistance to change became amplified and anything new was dismissed out of hand. In gathering the rich and dense data and in grouping the emergent issues, local
theory also emerged. In answering the fundamental theoretical question: *does performance management work in the public sector?*, the response was an emphatic “no!” in this group. Performance management may possibly work in pockets scattered across the public sector but not as a whole entity.

**THEMES AND LOCAL THEORY**

The final summary mind map that identified the key themes which led to theory development is provided below. The full version of this mind map is at Appendix 4.4 As mentioned earlier there is no clear delineation between the theories and the overlaps are often obvious.
Organisational Mixed Message Factor

It seemed that control and standardisation was a clear environmental imperative. Rules and regulations can make decision-making easier in some respects because staff do not need to question, the answer is in the manual, initiative does not need to be used. On a subtle level this does not promote individualism, independence and/or self-sufficiency. It does not generate ability to question or change the status quo. Although the work demanded the capacity to be flexible and innovative, the environment was sending out the message “we are risk averse and want consistency and standardisation”. It became learnt behaviour. Being unable to make decisions created a co-dependent relationship with the organisation, loss of confidence and trust; it limited thinking and the ability to explore options.

This suggests a local theory that:

In an environment where others have authority and prescribe decisions, staff can abrogate their responsibilities and disown the process. It is in a sense: triumph for the bureaucracy and traditional hierarchy.

Organisations need to make sure that what they say and what they do aligns with desired behaviours and capabilities.

“ME” Factor

The “Me” factor was unmistakable. In some form or another, the project group and/or the whole group articulated the “what’s in it for me” as a constant priority and catch-cry. There was little sense of team or corporate identity other than to adhere to the rules and regulation culture. This reinforced behaviours and attitudes which demonstrated limited ownership, limited the need to take responsibility and/or to do the right thing by the whole group.
Removing people's ability to think had a flow-on affect into almost shutting them down. They stopped thinking of the greater good and in a sense lost their moral compass.

In wanting a performance management system that delivered their individual professional development needs, the project group were not open or receptive to how that would impact on the whole group and/or the team. They did not seem to understand the consequences of having a disconnected individual professional development system operating. Anything new was dismissed automatically and they struggled with coming up with innovative ideas to do things differently to benefit each other rather than just themselves as an individual.

This suggests a local theory that:
Loss of team and corporate identity will increase the “ME” factor in workplaces. Focus will be on ‘what's in this for me’ and ‘what will the organisation do for me’. Benefit for the greater good and the whole group will be non-existent.

In this instance individuals triumph over the team and organisation.

Non-Performance Factor

The “Me” factor flowed into performance in other ways. The whole group wanted a system which would give them the ability to give upwards feedback but not be identified. When they were asked whether that would generate trust and confidence in the team as a whole, they did not seem to consider this a problem.

Their performance management system was either measured on an individual basis or not at all. Measurement of performance as a group rarely took place and was disconnected from the rest of the organisation. The measurement approach had little to do with individual performance.
Responses indicated that performance management had a disconnected reputation but remained unquestioned. Often it only took place once a year. In other organisations performance management took place possibly twice a year. It was acknowledged that nothing of real value came out of the process because it was disconnected and giving real feedback to people was often just too hard.

The performance management system sent out the message that it would not make people accountable or responsible. In fact it did not matter if you did not perform! If you adhered to the rules then all would be “well”. Lack of real feedback did not engender trust or confidence therefore in this instance the triumph was one of form over substance.

“We just want to avoid pain” was another response to performance management. Agencies across the sector acknowledged that significant investment and commitment is expended for very little value. One executive director said that even though it did not achieve much it continued to take place or attempts were continually made to reinvigorate something that just did not work. No one will stand up and say: This is not working can we please look for an alternative? So much effort and energy is being spent on something that is creating much angst for everyone involved. It is as if the status quo must be maintained at all cost.

This suggests a local theory that:
Performance management and measurement has little to do with individual and/or organisational performance. The system does not aid in helping people to be accountable or responsible. Performance management adds little value, is disconnected from the team and other systems and does not aid in the giving of real feedback but is repeatedly implemented.

In this instance the triumph is one of form over substance.
Inhibited Communication Factor

Unproductive conversations which take you nowhere, dismissing the new and constant blaming, whinging and complaining makes it difficult to develop trust to allow the group to have the conversations it needs to have. There were few opportunities to give real feedback, discuss the undiscussables and question and challenge. The culture was one of being busy, hence feedback was almost non-existent.

Poor communication leads to difficulties in relationships, unresolved and unrealistic expectations and/or misreading events and misunderstanding each other. The more the difficulties increased the less people felt committed and the less they produced in terms of work or wanting to be part of something that had the capacity to help the whole group.

In attempting to engage the whole group and obtain some clarity around ‘where to from here’, their responses were contradictory and confusing.

This suggests a local theory that:
Work environments need to support the holding of productive conversations. Such events need to allow for all views to be expressed. A new way of holding conversations needs to be established. Each person needs to acknowledge that their view is not the only ‘truth’. Exploring similarities and differences is healthy for everyone. In this instance the triumph is increased dysfunction and noise in the workplace!

Blame and Complain Factor

A culture of blame, whinging and complaining makes it extremely difficult to be open to new ways of thinking or to be able to explore alternatives. Blame and complain also did not allow for productive conversations. People will often not
have the conversations or come up with different ideas particularly when they will not be even tentatively considered or welcomed in principle.

The whole group and project group seemed too busy to think and too closed minded to learn. Their focus was on complaining and they could not look beyond that mind set. Some of the responses included: we don’t have time for this stuff; are you going to give us something practical and useful in all of this; where is the performance management form – you haven’t given it to us; this stuff isn’t relevant; you only gave us one option isn’t there any more?

In such an environment, unless there is going to be considerable effort and a focussed change management approach implemented for the group, there would probably be little possibility of anything changing.

Trying to get the group to suspend the organisational rules and to start experimenting means they would need to unlearn or unfreeze entrenched behaviours replicated over and over in their workplace.

**This suggests a local theory that:**

It is extremely difficult to hold productive conversations that explore different options when the culture is one of blame and whinging. Often this will prevent groups from having the discussions they need to have. This is a triumph for the group who became too busy to think and too closed minded to learn.

**“Stuckedness” Factor**

Blaming and complaining is also linked to being stuck. Focus is on the negative rather than the positive. The whole group and the project group often repeated the mantra: we do not have enough time; there is a lack of resources; there is no support to do this. Yet the group was prepared to go through the motions and repeat implementing a performance management system that did not work and
did not produce useful outcomes! There was no acknowledgement that they were prepared to put a lot of time, effort and energy into something that produced negligible benefits rather than come up with a different solution!

In fairness, if we do not know what we do not know how can we do anything to change it? If we do not see that we are stuck, if we do not have the conversations to discuss things we do not usually talk about, then nothing changes. Being stuck and resistant to change means that we continually reproduce and ‘do’ what has always been done without questioning. However this was a team that needed to be at the cutting edge of their game. They needed to demonstrate an ability to continually and rapidly transform and change, yet such an attitude was not apparent.

The group was struggling with internalising and accepting the most recent changes which had come out of the review. They did not seem to have internalised the restructure recommendations. Probably, in their view, a researcher coming along and suggesting a different way of thinking about undertaking performance management was just the ‘icing on the cake’ so to speak.

Embedding a change ethos in the group may help them to see the patterns that they were repeating. The figure below attempts to demonstrate the key factors in understanding change within individuals to design a process that could help the group:
Dealing with reactions to change and emotions is perhaps something that needs to be addressed by the organisation and the group in order to help with change and support healthy behaviours. No doubt the group was probably grieving for what was and became unable to move forward. Given that learning and change are closely linked there were indicators of not being open to new ways of thinking and learning. Some type of intervention needs to be considered on a longer term basis for the group.

Learning through reflection and deep discussion with mentors and critical friends is one approach that could also be considered.
“Leadership Suppressor” Factor

The most recent review/restructure identified gaps in leadership for program and project leaders. To address this issue the review recommended leadership programs and professional development. Leadership however seems to go much deeper than training and a focus on individual professional development needs.

The group was self-unaware and not open to learning. They displayed limited curiosity and experimentation. They were also unable to see patterns, connections and consequences during the project. The group were so task focussed in terms of their work – other issues became secondary or not on their agenda at all. They had difficulty in demonstrating or owning that ‘leadership’ was an issue they needed to invest in. Unless the group considered leadership an important and valuable capability to acquire, it would be difficult to implement anything that would be adopted or internalised in any way.

If as Kets de Vries [2001:12] suggests that “…the challenge of effective leadership is to break out of the box…” how can this occur when the organisation does not support staff from breaking out of the box and wants control, sustainability and stability in the working environment?
On a number of levels, leadership was not apparent during the project. For example the project group did not understand the self, the need to generate stronger relationships or the need to be proactive, innovative and creative. This will be an ongoing problem for the group unless it is addressed in some way that suits them and unless ownership is generated.

**This suggests a local theory that:**
In bureaucratic, controlled environments people are less likely to display leadership potential and capabilities. Leadership training programs and individual professional development are inadequate vehicles in developing leadership skills when they are disconnected from the greater organisation. A concerted meaningful effort needs to be made to improve leadership for individuals, teams and divisions and not just for directors and executives of organisations.

**The Ostrich Disconnect Factor**

Overall there was a sense of disconnection between performance, professional development, dealing with change, having the conversations that needed to be had, and demonstration of leadership. There was no consideration of how these systems overlap or the connection points. It was as if it was easier to ignore the whole so as not to address how it would impact on the rest of the organisation, the team, the division. It seemed a short-term and short-sighted approach. There was little evidence of looking at the whole rather that individual parts [or systems] contained within the organisation.

In having a focus on just performance management, or individual professional development or leadership, the notion of a quick fix solution seemed to pervade thinking. If we just fix this bit and this bit, everything else will not be a problem. It was like an ostrich burying its head in the ground with its bum exposed to everyone!
In summary the disconnection points between the themes are diagrammatically displayed below:

**Connections between Local Theory Factors**

- **Change fatigue** creates stuck behaviours which limits questioning and learning.
- **Leadership, learning and change** are less likely to be displayed in controlled environments.
- **Blame and whinging** prevents open discussions and exploring alternatives.
- **Systems of dubious value that do not aid performance** are perpetuated.
- **Rules and regulations** lead to an abrogation of responsibility and decision making.

This suggests a local theory that:

It is dangerous to bury your head in the sand and deal with systemic issues separately. All that will be achieved is disconnection from the whole and dysfunctional behaviours.

In creating change, improving performance, improving leadership and learning the whole needs to be examined rather than isolated pockets within the system and its impact on individuals and the organisation.
SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS OF THEORY

The mind mapping process aided considerably in first identifying issues contained in the data, helping to see the interrelationships among the concepts, grouping the emerging themes and finally developing local theory. The theory that emerged from the research included: mixed messages, the ME factor, non-performance, inhibited communication, blame and complain, ‘stuckedness’, leadership suppressor and an ostrich disconnect factor. Overall a hierarchical and bureaucratic environment allows for: the abrogation of responsibilities, disowning processes, loss of team and corporate identity and increasing self-interest. Performance management and measurement has little to do with individual and/or organisational performance. The system does not aid in helping people to be accountable or responsible. Work environments need to support the holding of productive conversations to explore similarities and differences in thinking. Blame and whinging prevents groups from having the discussions they need to have. When we become stuck we repeat unhealthy patterns and behaviours. Time, effort and energy will be spent on negligible systems that produce little benefit. In such work environments opportunities to change, learn and display leadership capabilities is unlikely. Being stuck and resistant to change limits learning and reproduces what has always been done without questioning. It is dangerous to bury your head in the sand and deal with systemic issues separately. All that will be achieved is disconnection from the whole and dysfunctional behaviours.
CHAPTER 8
PERSONAL LEARNING
Chapter 8:

- Provides insight into the deep learning that took place for the researcher.
- Explains the internal struggle in trying to understand the self and the behaviours that came pouring out of the group.
- Discusses how attempts were made to deal with personal emotions and values that kept surfacing.
- Confirms the difficulties with the project process and managing change within the self and change within others.
- Describes how the use of reflective techniques, mentors and critical friends aided the process.

INTRODUCTION

Action learning has the potential to create change not just for the project group but also for researchers. The spirals within the action research cycles aid in increasing the observation and reflection skills of all involved – if they are so inclined. This chapter deals with the deep learning that took place for me as the researcher. The methodology kept challenging me to look at the self. The greatest challenge and struggle came about through examining preconceived views and understandings of my own behaviour and managing my frustrations and emotions. Unconscious and long-held assumptions kept rising to the surface and deep learning took place because fears had to be faced. Dealing with uncertainty and thus being totally outside my comfort zone also aided learning.
The following sections deal with my struggle in understanding action learning, action research methodologies, my struggle to understand myself and the impact on the group, dealing with uncertainty and fear and the importance of reflective practices, mentors and critical friends.

**A FLEDGING RESEARCHER STARTING THE PROCESS**

There were a number of issues that troubled me about commencing an action learning, action research project in the public sector. Would an action learning approach be compatible with the group? How would they react to someone trying to help with a new way of thinking, being and doing? Would people in the public sector be open to an action learning approach? Often we are task-focussed and have limited resources in workplaces, therefore would an intangible learning approach be perceived as useful and be allowed to emerge? In a 1991 video recording, Reg Revans stated:

> It's difficult in this life to get a new idea anywhere. Introduce a new idea into a system and it takes time to be accepted. New ideas will be opposed by the stupid and ridiculed by the clever. [1991]

Would I be confronted with opposition and how would I respond to that? Did I have the skill, knowledge and experience to help the group? These were concerns running around in my head. It takes courage to disagree and it takes wisdom and foresight to maintain an environment of equality in which all perspectives can be considered. Action learning is not an immediately tangible process and it is not one based on expediency. It's time consuming and does not fit the mantra: “we do not have enough time to do this”. Would I have the courage to manage this feedback and ask the questions I needed to ask?

Often I felt I had an insufficient grasp of action learning, action research processes to allow me to confidently implement the project. This meant I was uncertain and did not press people on roles and responsibilities. The question
then becomes was I sufficiently explicit in my communication to explore agendas?

Procrastination and Resistance

The extent of my procrastination and resistance to starting the project was a stand-out discovery. My perception of myself was that I always get in and do what needs to be done to progress things as quickly as possible. Another surprise was resistance at acknowledging the procrastination and resistance! Many excuses were used including my lack of knowledge in relation to action learning/action research methodologies, the thought of making mistakes, and the thought of looking foolish in front of my peers.

Overall, the number of legitimate excuses used was very impressive. I acknowledged to myself my resourcefulness and innovation as I continued to justify my inaction. Yet, all my cupboards were clean and the louvers throughout the house were sparkling. On reflection, I realised how easily we can immerse ourselves in talking ourselves out of something rather than taking a risk, or taking action and just doing it. On the positive side, I did start to see the pattern and explore the emotional response in tackling something new and uncertain.

Cherry [1999:125] confirms that students and clients often baulk at the idea of starting a project for reasons outlined above! She also confirms that inaction can seriously affect the progress and outcomes of a project. In the long-run this is what happened with this project. Constant time delays and inaction from within the organisation as well as my procrastination definitely did not help. This meant the project took 2 ½ years to get to completion.

VALUES EXPOSING

Herr and Anderson [2005:4] confirm that:

Like all forms of inquiry, action research is value laden.

And
Action research takes place in settings that reflect a society characterized by conflicting values and unequal distribution of resources and power. [2005:4]

We are often unaware of our values because they are so deep within us and what better way to get them to the surface than using an action learning approach. Values that came rushing to the surface during the project were:

![My Values Diagram](image)

**We want to learn and change and have a thirst for knowledge**

Prior to working with the project group I had been studying consecutively for a period of about eleven years. In the more recent years, part of that learning had been using an action learning approach with Dr Murray Redman. Insight into my personality, behaviour, values and assumptions were critical in creating change within. If change and learning helps to create deeper understanding of the self, then would this not be welcomed and valued?

This meant I unknowingly believed everyone else would also value learning and change. This correlated to either creating and/or participating in an opportunity to learn and grow together. In retrospect this was probably a totally unrealistic expectation: one which I was not initially aware of and one which led to misunderstandings and frustrations on both sides.
My behaviour was, albeit unwittingly, trying to force change and learning on a
group that did not have similar values. It was like speaking a foreign language
which possibly had the effect of frightening if not confusing them! This deeply
held assumption, however, probably led to the use of inappropriate language on
a subtle level.

We want to go beyond satisfying our own needs and we want to improve
the self and help others

After the initial meetings with the Alice Springs and Darwin groups and the
management project group it was clear that self-interest was a key driver. This
was confirmed with the Director during reflection meetings. The “What’s in it for
me” factor kept arising at every opportunity. Even when I realised this I did not
challenge the group or question them about their keen focus on wanting to satisfy
their own development needs.

Repeatedly the group said they wanted significant amounts of, and access to,
professional development. In particular, they wanted a commitment from the
organisation to resource personal professional development which could take the
form of a number of areas including, conferences, training programs and field
trips. There did not seem to be an understanding or interest in growing and
learning as a group and on the job.

Unrealistic expectations arising out of values

Reason [1988:148] suggests that there is value in a process that allows
opportunity to reflect on behaviour, attitude and feelings and trying to do things
differently. This presupposes however that the group are agreeable to do this.
My values placed unrealistic expectation on the group as it assumed that:

- People want to learn
- People want to take risks
- Learning something less than complimentary about yourself, although
  confronting, has long term benefits
• Through the action learning project the group could be encouraged to change

• Client, academic, workplace and personal needs contained in the project were not insurmountable and tensions could be managed.

• An action learning approach would be considered valuable by the group even though it can at times be intangible in nature as well as subversive.

On reflection this combination of assumptions created a certain degree of tension for me and the group. Did they not want to grasp personal learning or self-awareness / reflection practices? Was a search for such truth or knowledge something that was valued by them? Deeper discussion and understanding may have aided to clarify this point.

In attempting to motivate the group to appreciate and value internal personal learning to the same degree appreciated by me, was unrealistic in retrospect. In my mind I saw ‘self-awareness’ as the mechanism to improve dysfunction in organisations – hence the performance management project was a secondary consideration. To find truth we need to look within and not place responsibility and blame on others.

**Learning through reflection:**

We don’t know what we don’t know

We cannot assume that our knowledge, understanding and awareness can be readily transferred to others. It takes time.

Everyone learns at different stages if they are ready.

You can only intervene when a group is willing to allow this to happen.
DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR

Fear came from a number of areas: unknown and bewildering methodological approaches and within that trying to grasp the meaning of a new language and concepts. Adding to the confusion was what appeared to be a lot of conflicting information which created a messy conglomeration of different ways of thinking. As I was trying to come to terms with grasping something I did not fully understand I started working with a group that probably did not want me to be there!

Generally we tend to focus on the negative rather than the positives in difficult situations so I set about putting together a comparison table to help me to see the pros and cons of the situation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPARISON OF NEGATIVES &amp; POSITIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naive fledgling researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited knowledge of research methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling with chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of how it all fits together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bewildering new language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to intangible nature of constructivist approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14
I likened the approach to undertaking an internal SWOT analysis to allow me to see the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that were possible for me. In this way I identified areas that were not all negative and to acknowledge in a tangible way that there were clearly some positives.

Even though it was a struggle to understand the literature and the amount of often overwhelming information it contained, I persevered. There was no doubt in my mind that this was probably all compounded with thoughts of failure and not looking foolish with the group. The more frustrated I found myself becoming, the less I understood what I was trying to grasp. The more anxious I felt, the more I struggled to understand the less I understood. Why could this not be structured, clear, black and white? Why could I not find the answers immediately to the difficulties that were confronting me?! So I went back to basics and asked myself a series of questions:

1. What was the aim of the research?
2. What was the nature of the research questions?
3. Was I clear about my own paradigm or basic set of beliefs that would guide my actions?
4. How much control would I exert?
5. What was the level of intervention I would exert?
6. Did I have sufficient time and resources to do this work?
7. Would my organisation allow me to undertake the research and give me time to undertake the work?

When we are stuck Reason [1988] suggests that sometimes it is best to stop and just be in order to make sense of our observations and observations of others or absorb unknown concepts and ideas within intellectual readings.

I likened this to a ‘digestion’ phase to allow time to internalise and to allow space to conceptualise and think about how all the different parts could fit together. What I did not grasp initially was the difference between avoidance and incubation [Etherington, 2004:257]. This point brings to the surface the issue of
allowing new ideas and concepts time to germinate and grow. Although it sounds quite simple, the learning in this chapter took the best part of the project to emerge, to be accepted and internalised on some level.

**Learning through reflection:**

Understanding the difference between procrastination and incubation

When you are stuck – letting it be. Allowing time and space to ‘digest’ information.

To solve problems for yourself or others you need to ask good questions

It all made me realise that when we are trying to learn and grapple with something new we can choose where we want to be on the ‘knowledge continuum’! Even in the struggle there is usually an answer and time sorts it all out in the end.

**Knowledge Continuum**

Figure 33 – Source: Emerged from researcher’s internal feelings of confusion!
Awareness increased as I questioned and challenged myself about where I chose to be on the continuum and how I would deal with the consequential emotion. In questioning and challenging myself it helped to become ‘unstuck’!

Where am I at?
Why do I struggle unnecessarily?
Why do I not trust the process?
Do I not consider myself flexible and receptive?
Why do I expect to be perfect?
Why do I want to understand everything immediately – is this realistic?

In trying to answer these questions it allowed me to learn in the following areas:

Learning through reflection:

My internal patterns are so subtle and deep I repeat unwanted or unhelpful behaviour.

Something fairly powerful needs to happen to create internal change within me.

I am always at the beginning and can choose to change.

It is my choice to internalise change and make it sustainable.

There were interesting parallels between the struggles within the two main paradigms: positivist and constructivist. If I was a true constructivist would I not welcome periods of uncertainty and change and stop resisting? Was the enculturation I had received within the public sector for 30 years overriding my natural instincts to allow it to be messy and non-sequential, to allow for complexity, to allow the knowledge to emerge slowly and naturally from the process? Once I allowed myself to slow down and be I realised I could choose to continue resisting or I could be patient and allow the natural process of change and learning to emerge at its own pace because no exertion was necessary.
THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORS AND CRITICAL FRIENDS

Mentors and critical friends were ‘critical’ in the project. They helped me to reflect on the process being used, they helped to reality test thoughts and feelings as they surfaced, identify new strategies and approaches, test new ideas and plan all over again.

If you are on your own it is one-dimensional and possibly may limit outcomes and learning. It may be that you repeat patterns because there is no intervention or other point of view challenging your perceptions. External challenge is therefore healthy. I found that my learning was richer and deeper because I gained greater insight into the self from their feedback. Their perceptions of me and of the process helped in refining the action learning project. It acknowledged that I do not have all the answers and broadens thinking through the exchange taking place between people who trust each other.

In talking through my frustration with the group with two mentor/coaches they provided me with the following advice and insight:

Stop fighting with the group. On a subconscious level they will pick up on this and sense how you are treating them.

No-one likes to be made to feel like they are being naughty and unconsciously they will resist back.

Try a different way of facilitating the group. Be prepared to change your approach in some way. Turn the negative into positive energy otherwise nothing will change.

I then sought the advice of another mentor/critical friend to aid in suggesting different options in terms of facilitation. The suggestions included:
Learning through mentors/critical friends:

Give the group direction and structure if and when they need it.

Slowly wean them off their dependency of you because this is what they’re used to.

Lock into their style and use techniques that will bring them along in the process like using the trigger statements: *you know that….., you know these things……you know how to manage your…..you've got these skills so…….*

Don’t assume the group has the knowledge and awareness that you have.

Support the group in the struggle to find the answers rather than giving them the answers.

Schein [1988] confirmed that when you put forward solutions prematurely it does not allow others to fully explore issues and internalise and own the problem or develop an appropriate solution. He states that a consultant must not share insights prematurely as it may damage their credibility. Even if the consultant is right, the client often can react defensively, not listen, shut down and subvert the remedial effort – which is what happened to some extent with this project.

Someone giving you the answer or even reading advice in a book does not internalise the need to do something differently. However, the learning did come eventually by doing and acknowledging that the outcomes could have been improved if I had chosen to facilitate the group differently.

Another mentor suggested the need to appreciate displays of incompetence and mediocrity as it provided opportunities to help. He questioned my low level of tolerance and patience which impacted on helping people to struggle to find the answer. He reinforced the message that real learning takes time and unless I accepted that each person’s “point of readiness” to change will vary quite extensively I would continue to struggle and be unhappy which would translate
to the group. He also provided the following advice in terms of helping the group get ‘unstuck’ as it where:

**IMPROVEMENT OF FACILITATION SKILLS**

The importance of continually trying to improve my listening and observation skills was also emphasised during the project. It was a blind spot. It was an area I thought I did quite well. Reflection aided me to see that I needed to:

- Listen in order to understand others rather than get them to understand and value my opinion!
- Suspend prejudices and fears in order to listen better.
- Stop listening for what I expected to hear rather than what was being said by the group.
- Stop sifting through others’ views for what I could use to make my own point because of my own fears and/or because there was something at stake for me.
When I reflected on why I did this I realised on some level I felt it was too difficult to really listen to everyone’s opinion. Being a “rapid processor” and picking up concepts and ideas relatively quickly, I often felt frustrated when the group was too slow at making connections. I wanted instant results! So the learning was to slow down and help everyone in the group to come to the same understanding. Although at times this may diminish the extent and depth of discussion, unless everyone has some level of understanding, real ownership is not engendered. In this way, it would help improve my observation of the whole group and to read individuals better.

Overall the learning was also pointing to another facilitation skill called patience! Learning to listen more carefully, increasing my observation skills, having a balanced amount of participation, providing suitable intervention and asking appropriate questions – were all areas which improved for me. Coghlan and Casey [2001:677] confirm other personal attributes required of researchers include the ability to:

- gather and organise data stimuli and perceptions of self and others
- display sound organisational and analytical capabilities
- effectively handle and manage organisational politics
- reframe issues and negotiate resolutions with excellent use of language
- give feedback on research
- demonstrate superior observation skills
- maintain credibility as an effective driver of change
- be astute at being a political player and to assess power and interests of relevant stakeholders i.e. a ‘political entrepreneur’
- facilitate and play a public performance role and build participation for change
- use ‘backstaging’ skills by intervening in political and cultural systems as well as influencing, negotiating and defeating any opposition. [2001:677]
INSIDER STATUS

Having completed the project, there is little doubt in my mind that being an insider inhibits the facilitation of change because often you feel you cannot say or do what you think needs to be said or done! I probably would have challenged more and asked more questions if I had not been an insider. Fear would have lessened which means I would have said no to unrealistic expectations and not tried to please everyone. It was an inhibitor for me.

The other issue that impacted on my relationship with the project group was the length of time it took to finalise the project. The greater time I worked with the group, the more I became one of the group, the less I challenged!

For all intents and purposes however, I was an insider of the public sector and everyone involved in the project knew this. The significance of having insider status was not initially apparent to me hence taking remedial action was not possible.

PERSONAL LEARNING REALISATIONS

My greatest self realisation came when I acknowledged that when change was being experienced I could feel overwhelmed with fear. Fear then created a feeling of being stuck and if I chose to I could:

- Chuck out the rule book……speak from the heart……take risks.
- Be patient with myself….acknowledge I do not need to be perfect.
- Challenge traditional beliefs, customs and values.
- Vote with my feet.
- Let go and trust that my knowledge will deepen as I go along.
Once again the learning sounds simplistic when it is described in this way. It is therefore important to point out that it is easier to ‘know’ the learning, than putting it into practice. Other important realisations took the following form:

**Personal Realisations**

- Co-opt help from champions - no-one achieves noble endeavours on their own
- See success in everything I do - realise success is deferred at times
- Nurture self & don’t work too hard
- Create space & balance & affirm I’m ok
- Have high standards but not unrealistic expectations
- Enjoy & relish imperfection & chaos
- Have fun in everything I do and be patient

![Figure 34](image.png)

**More Personal Realisations**

Another realisation for me was that there is no failure only deferred success – that everything we do is neither good nor bad – it just is. That out of negative comes positive and vice-versa. This is not to say that I did not feel disappointment with the project outcomes.

Action learning and action research has set me on a path to search for my own truth – that doesn’t mean I have all the answers or that I feel like I’ve arrived! It
does mean that I need to be dogged and persistent and determined in ‘knowing myself’ and continuing to reflect on my actions. What it also means is that I will continually look at ways to improve and continue to have a thirst for knowledge. It also means that I am contemplating more change in my life, my job, what I want to do in the future, where I want to be and how I want to get there. Change I would never have contemplated if I had not undertaken this project.

I was unsuccessful in getting the project group to adopt an action inquiry model. I was also unsuccessful in demonstrating that what they were doing on a daily basis [staff meetings and the like] did not constitute action learning practices i.e. the reflection wasn’t there and neither was the risk taking in identifying our individual practice and risking exposure to the wider group in order to learn and change our attitude and behaviour. Part of the problem was limited pockets of time with the project group to create sufficient understanding of the action learning cycles coupled with their resistance to trying something new. The other part of the problem was my own awareness and knowledge of the action learning model and confidence in putting it into practice. Nevertheless:

Some of the best lessons we ever learn, we learn from our mistakes and failures. The error of the past is the success and wisdom of the future.

Tyron Edwards [1809-1894].

What I’m currently doing is using an action inquiry model myself as a key learning approach in my own workplace and learning about my own management style. As I use several mentors and coaches to assist me in reflecting on my reactions and attitude and to provide me with insights into my internal patterns of being, doing and thinking I find an action inquiry model a complementary approach! In fact it built up more of an internal reflection approach when used in conjunction with mind mapping [Buzan, 2000].
Organisational Realisations

Coghlan and Brannick [2005:120] confirm change and learning can take place between individuals, groups, between groups and extends to the overall organisation and cite Lewin’s [1948] model that:

…a system must unlearn before it can relearn…the change process has three stages or sets of issues: being motivated to change, changing, and making the change survive and work.

All three stages are of equal importance and need to be managed. Coghlan and Brannick [2005:120] also confirm that:

…concrete problems are symptoms of complex attitudinal and cultural problems which must be addressed and that problem resolution involves organisational transformation.

They believe that systems thinking and practice in conjunction with action research cycle may play complementary roles which would assist organisations to start the learning process. They suggest this can be done by:

**Systems Thinking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishing circuitry</th>
<th>When A does….what does B do? What does A do next?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing patterns</td>
<td>What patterns are evident over time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring meaning</td>
<td>What are the meanings held in the system? What are the common meanings attributed to events and actions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring covert rules</td>
<td>What unarticulated and hidden rules govern behaviour?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the time dimensions</td>
<td>How time delays have an impact on the system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15
The project seemed to indicate that in many ways we have not only stopped struggling to learn we have stopped valuing real learning. Given that organisations are made up of people and given that people are displaying passive-aggressive behaviour and low self-esteem which flows on to the organisation – would this not mean that the organisation has low self-esteem and make an organisation want to change? The odds would appear to be against it because we will always do what we have always done – that’s what’s comfortable and that’s what we know.

Learning through reflection:

- Often the need to change remains unknown and unacknowledged – we don’t know what we don’t know.
- We continually repeat patterns. Patterns are reinforced if our behaviour has allowed us to gain advantage or was seen as being ‘a success’ in the organisation.
- This is the paradigm we are in that maintains the status quo in the system. People who do not conform will be appropriately marginalised.

SO WHAT HAPPENED?

On reflection this is how I believe it unfolded:

- The group knew it was a project that I was keen to undertake because of my study, so I had ownership but they did not. Buy-in from the executive helped but it was a continual struggle to obtain the project group’s support and participation.
- Having worked in the public sector for a considerable amount of time I did not want to be seen as being unprofessional or the project failing. My credibility was at stake. I had to deal with this fear which probably translated itself to the group in a variety of ways.
The issue of insider status, credibility and professionalism inhibited me from asking the questions I should have asked the group.

If I place myself in the shoes of the individuals in the project group they probably thought “who is this person?”; “why does she think she has anything of value to offer us?” I probably thought [subconsciously] that I was going to save them by introducing an action learning approach and add value by obtaining their participation and gratitude!

As previously mentioned, my values and the groups values were not in accord with one another. It was not just about change and learning. It was also about wanting to help others and being open to new ways of thinking.

Not knowing what you don’t know helped in identifying long held beliefs. For example instead of being frustrated with the group because they were unable to do some blue-sky-thinking I could have displayed more empathy with the knowledge that learning happens where and when it is needed. My behaviour could probably be likened to “well hurry up and get the new concept and run with it!” For this reason there was a lack of real understanding and ability to accept people for where they were at.

I had difficulty leaving the group because I could not see how I had added value in any way.

It is important to emphasise that from my perspective the project failed. I hold this view because I saw little demonstrable actions or understanding of the action learning, action research approach. The group had difficulty in using reflection and they wanted to stay with a status-quo performance management approach. Overall, the project was salvaged to some extent by three things: the support obtained from the Executives; careful triangulation of data and theoretical and methodological literatures to inform the study; and the deep reflection process using mentors and critical friends.
SUMMARY

This chapter has provided information about the researcher’s deep learning. It explains the internal struggle that took place in trying to understand the self as well as trying to deal with group dynamics. In the end great insight was gained in understanding personal emotions that kept surfacing and how values can impact when facilitating a group who has diametrically different values. It confirms that action learning and reflection with mentors and critical friends is a valuable technique that allows for internal learning and growth.
Chapter 9:

- Explains how issues of validity and rigour were addressed.
- Describes how the testing of validity criteria aided in the evaluation process.
- Discusses to what extent the ex-Director of the Project Group helped with the evaluation of research conclusions and outcomes.
- Explains that if the outcomes of the project were unsuccessful this does not necessarily mean findings are invalid.
- Critiques underlying assumptions and perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter revisits how the methodology aided in validating the research and provides a basis for evaluation of project outcomes. It also confirms how the reflective process aided evaluation. An explanation and illustration is provided of the triangulation, reflection and evaluation process that was used during the research project. The Director of the Group [who has since left the role] provides independent comment on the research project and the group’s reaction which aided in critiquing the underlying assumptions and perspectives which emerged during the project.
HOW WERE ISSUES OF VALIDITY AND RIGOUR ADDRESSED

Grounded theory was used to aid in issues of validity by focussing on theoretical sampling, saturation and sorting. The data which emerged from this approach was used in the creation of mind maps. In this way connections and patterns surfaced that were used in triangulation interviews allowing several different perspectives to be obtained in the analysis of the same data.

The consistency of the emerging issues gave confidence that the observations and conclusions were valid. The process of obtaining data from the group, appropriately questioning the data, making comparisons, drawing on external sources and testing my own reactions with mentors and critical friends added to increased rigour and validity. This approach demonstrates how the data was generated, gathered and explored.

It is in this chapter that we explore how the data was evaluated, interpreted and questioned during the multiplicity of cycles of action research. In addition, it is here that we start to tease out the layers of meta-cycles of inquiry and attempt to identify the areas of “learning about learning” [Coghlan and Brannick 2005:25]. The figure below provides an illustration of the evaluation process used in this research project:
The figure attempts to identify how and what drove the cycles of action learning and meta cycles of reflection to illustrate that the process was driven by the data. It also attempts to demonstrate that reflection was underpinned by questions about content, process and premise to ensure that assumptions and interpretations were tested and challenged: via questioning the self and questioning others in order to confirm and disconfirm interpretations.

Lastly, the figure attempts to demonstrate the overall evaluation process taken by first holding discussions with the ex Director of the group and then reflecting and critiquing the underlying assumptions and perspectives that surfaced from the group and possible explanations for the overall outcomes.
The ex Director provided valuable insight and understanding in terms of the culture and sub-culture operating in the environment, its impact on the group and how this often translated into inaction to learning for the project group. From these discussions the primary focus then became one of identifying the underlying assumptions and perspectives that emanated from the project and whole groups.

EX DIRECTOR EVALUATION DISCUSSIONS

There are many evaluation approaches. As an example, Coghlan and Brannick [2005:29] apply the following criteria to determine whether a project constituted ‘good action research’ by questioning if it is:

- a good story;
- [there’s] rigorous reflection on that story; and
- [there’s] an extrapolation of usable knowledge or theory from the reflection on the story. [2005:29]

To test the validity of this research the discussions with the ex Director used the criteria that achieves action research goals [Herr and Anderson [2005:55], refer Chapter 4] as being the:

- extent to which actions occurred which led to a problem being resolved
- generation of new knowledge
- achievement of action-oriented outcomes
- education of both researcher and participants
- results that were relevant to the local setting and
- appropriateness of research methodology.

Was a Problem Solved?

The original problem was: does performance management work in the public sector? The problem was reframed in a number of ways which led the sponsor to request the researcher to report back these findings to the executive. This meant
that, through the researcher asking and challenging difficult perspectives, the problem became more complex and led to a fresh set of questions being asked of the original issue. Eventually the Executive and the whole and project groups acknowledged that performance management does not necessarily work sufficiently well to improve performance.

Obtaining critical feedback from participants and reporting this back to the Executive was ground breaking – as was having discussions about an unquestioned fact of life: the way performance management is dealt with in a large bureaucracy. Examination of the performance management system had not been undertaken prior to this research project. Gaining the Executive’s agreement to pilot the use of a different approach like After Action Reviews [AARs] was a second ground breaking event. In effect, it was established at the Executive level that a new approach to performance management needed to be put into practice.

The Executive supported the exploration and piloting of a new approach, they also supported staff in coming up with new ways of improving their performance, leadership and innovation skills. The ex Director of the Group [who was also the sponsor] affirmed that this was the case. He also agreed that, as an Executive, they were very open to a new way to improve performance. He confirmed that organisational constraints did make it difficult to achieve many outcomes in the face of:

- a culture which did not want to be challenged;
- an inability to deal with ambiguity; and
- limited learning because the group was time poor, resource poor and under increased pressure to perform.

He said that often he was amazed that anything was achieved within the bureaucracy! He said that there was no overall change agenda operating and little support to manage people issues which constantly demanded time – especially from highly fatigued staff. He went on to explain that often people were so exhausted in dealing with the chaos it meant they felt neglected or hurt or fearful – or were experiencing all three emotions at the same time!
Gaining the understanding and commitment of an Executive however is only part of the solution. The project groups’ understanding and commitment was achieved to some extent in acknowledging that performance management did not work. However, the ex Director agreed that they did not become part of the process nor did they want to be part of the solution in developing something that would work for them. He explained that in accepting a system that did not work, it was probably symptomatic of the environment and just trying to ‘keep their heads above water’ and not create more work.

He acknowledged the project group’s resistance to participate in action learning and reflection, their apparent reluctance to try something new or generate ideas to solve a problem which had consequential flow-on effects during the research project. He explained this was partly due to exhaustion as well as personal baggage in approaching more change. He confirmed they were struggling to break free of well-established ways of thinking about performance management, hence it was not possible for the original problem to be solved.

To answer the question: Was a Problem Solved?, the answer is probably only to the extent that it was acknowledged that performance management was not producing the results required of the individuals or the organisation. The project group was not prepared to take that next step and use AARs to improve performance. Therefore the problem in the longer term remained unresolved.

The test of validity explored within this research project was not whether the process was a success as far as results were concerned: the emphasis was placed on the exploration of the data and development of theory and how it may have contributed to learning and change. Success or otherwise of the project was therefore seen as a secondary issue.
Was New Knowledge Generated?

New knowledge was generated in a number of ways and for a variety of people involved in the research project. As discussed above, new knowledge was generated for the Executive and then the project group in the use of AARs – albeit even for a short period of time.

Many of the whole group participants would often not be part of a research or review project such as this, hence they were able to participate, contribute and have their voices heard. In this way the process had the potential of generating new knowledge for the whole group. It is important to confirm that there is no way of knowing this for certain or the extent of knowledge generation for the whole group.

The use of triangulation interviews meant new knowledge was generated for a varied cohort across the public sector as well as me, as the researcher. In holding interviews about a topic like performance management which often is unquestioned, it meant that multiple and different perspectives were taken into account during the project. Questioning and challenging a system that has been in place for many years, also allowed for the gaining of new knowledge and insights for participants and the researcher. Collecting multiple perspectives aided in seeing the events more deeply rather than in a ‘self-serving’ way or just through my eyes [Herr and Anderson 2005:56].

Regular discussions were held with the sponsor to check and confirm outcomes. During these discussions new knowledge and insights were generated particularly for the sponsor and the researcher. For the group, the process allowed for a questioning and challenging approach to be commenced and a different way of thinking to be suggested. Asking the group to explore new ways of thinking and changing the way they work may not have produced all the results that were wanted but it may have ‘planted some seeds’ for some members of the whole and project groups.
During discussions with the ex-Director he acknowledged that my insider status often seemed to hamper my ability to ask and challenge to the extent I could have if I had been outside the organisation. He also acknowledged that as we were both ‘insiders’ he thought we often spoke ‘around the truth’ but now, because we were both ‘outsiders’ we could speak more openly. He suggested that even though the project group had not seemed to accept an action learning approach that this was not necessarily just a reflection of me, as a fledgling researcher, attempting a new approach. In his view the resistance came from factors including:

- the nature of the work of the members of the group and their professional ‘bent’ not lending itself to being open to an action learning, action research approach
- it being a natural reaction to the project representing more change
- the culture operating in the organisation not facilitating the struggle to break free from well-established ways of working and thinking and seemingly locked into a reliance on bureaucracy
- a protracted project timeline, the work probably needed to be completed within six months
- an unwillingness of members to show any enthusiasm in tackling something new or being open to learning.

This seems to indicate the generation of new knowledge, understanding and awareness for the ex-Director and for myself.

**What Action-Oriented Outcomes were/were not Achieved?**

Based on principles and values of action research a number of action-oriented outcomes were achieved. The process attempted to be cooperative, collaborative to allow issues to emerge. A real problem was identified and in an attempt to solve this problem, local theory was developed.

Observations and interactions took place with the sponsor, whole group, project group and executive group through focus groups, feedback sessions, meetings and
report backs. These multiple sources aided in increasing the participation of the whole and project groups, evaluating issues that were emerging and starting to diagnose and think about new strategies and procedures to solve problems.

The findings were as a result of a series of reflective cycles between the researcher, sponsor and the executive of a large bureaucracy. The relationship with the project group worked to the extent that they participated in each meeting but were unable to demonstrate a degree of reflection in terms of how they wanted as a group to drive a new agenda and a new way of working forward in terms of AARs.

Critiquing unstated and unconscious underlying assumptions which govern attitudes and behaviours was achieved for the researcher and the sponsor. Again it is unclear to what extent such thinking and such an approach was created for members of the project group. Although attempts were made to use reflection techniques with the project group they, in the main, did not want to participate. Reflecting and talking in this way was not ‘normal’ or ‘comfortable’ for the group because the paradigm that was operating was one of an external person “giving them the answers” rather than the group generating the thinking to resolve the problem.

The ex Director confirmed that some of the underlying assumptions for the group were:

- the process being too intangible by not producing concrete results and giving immediate answers;
- the process being too slow, a struggle and too painful for busy people
- their inability to acknowledge that the process allowed for ‘getting issues on the table and out of their system’
- their behaviour seemingly locked into a cycle of negativity, criticising everything rather than focussing on positives.

The organisational mandate for the group was that they wanted them to display leadership and innovation. Scott and Harker [1998:74] confirm this view by stating:
With the growing change agenda, we require the capacity to be continuously scanning the environment for opportunities and continuously monitoring our competitors for the initiatives they are taking which might threaten our competitive advantage in the ever-improving consumer-oriented marketplace [1998:74].

At the same time, the organisation seemed to have almost abrogated its responsibility to the group by not supporting them in some way to be in a position to deliver on this mandate. Examples of some facilitating structures that could be used are provided in the figure below:

**FACILITATING STRUCTURES**

- **Overall Systemic issues for organisations.**
  - Do they involve employees in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating interventions?
  - Can employees easily access information, knowledge, rewards and power?
  - What dialogue mechanisms exist and with whom?
  - How openly do people talk to one another?
  - Can people challenge superiors without repercussions? Can people make mistakes?

- **Participation of People through Supportive Frameworks**
  - Regular action learning group meetings to generate solutions and options
  - Bigger Forums / Open discussions / Executive updates
  - Access to support people, mentors, critical friends - to reflect and gain self-awareness
  - Opportunities to tell stories and lessons learned
  - Rituals, morning teas etc.
  - Communications from organisation

- **Other Issues for Consideration**
  - Organisation needs to ensure there is congruence between ‘what we say and what we do’. If we say we value something then we need to demonstrate it on every level.
  - Line managers could become facilitators, mentors, coaches, project managers, have conflict resolution skills.
  - Develop a culture of participation and improvement through supportive frameworks.

Figure 36 - Source: Scott and Harker [1998:76]
Scott and Harker [1998:76] suggest that small group meetings, held frequently, are a healthy way to process serious and widespread problems. They qualify this view by stating that these meetings need to be facilitated by experienced conflict resolution facilitators and that if a change management holistic system is put in place it can be quite costly for the organisation. They also suggest other ‘facilitating structures’ including: executive visits, communications, rituals, discussions, support-people to aid discussions and reflections.

The question that remained for the organisation however was: What was preventing the organisation from putting these structures in place? For the group, the question was: What was preventing them from demonstrating leadership to put such an approach into action? It is this issue of inaction which is explored further in the section on critiquing underlying assumptions and perspectives below.

**Did the Process Educate the Researcher and Participants?**

Because the project was a relatively long-drawn-out affair, a comprehensive iterative process took place for the researcher and the sponsor. The extent that participants were educated is unclear. Given the lack of participation it may be fair to say that the process did not educate them. Nevertheless, during this time period a number of authentic relationships developed with group members and the researcher and particularly the sponsor.

The process did challenge a system that had been in place for some time, entrenched behaviours and ways of thinking and doing were evident. My own biases and responses to negative attitudes rose to the surface and had to be dealt with during the research project. It was extremely useful to understand where and why I was reacting to resistance in the way that I did and to try different ways of working with a group that had difficulty changing. Areas of ‘education’ for the researcher, organisation and the group are summarised as being:
Researcher

Understanding the nature of paradigms and patterns and their impact on people and the environment, allowed for a degree of appreciation of how unconscious ways of doing things impact on our everyday life. If you ‘don’t know what you don’t know’ how can you change? Some degree of comprehension about defence mechanisms leading to unquestioned resistance was a key learning [Carlopio 1998:17]. Experiencing this is much more powerful than just reading it or superficially talking about it.

Gaining deeper self-awareness was extremely educative. During discussions with mentors and critical friends many of my “taken for granted behaviours and responses” came under scrutiny. At times it was like having to become an observer outside myself as I spoke and simultaneously sensed my reactions and tried to understand emotions which kept bubbling up to the surface. Often the intensity of the feelings meant I did not deal with things immediately but worked through emotions before I was able to gain clarity, process issues to the extent I could then try to place myself in other people’s shoes. The struggle was worth it.

As I reflected on the research project I realised that I regularly had to ‘reorient my view of reality and my view of my role’ [Herr and Anderson 2005:56]. Being open meant I was able to look within but it did not mean that I found it an easy process – there were challenges and struggles for me particularly when I identified that at times I was taking an ‘ego’ position. The journal of my struggles was an integral part of understanding how fear and resistance to change inhibits being open to new ways of thinking.

Organisational Learning

There were a number of reciprocal areas of organisational learning: for me the understanding that the organisation’s executive wanted change but in many ways was unsure about how to make that happen. From the organisation’s perspective understanding that the system they had was actually not improving anything and people felt very cynical and resistant
toward it. In addition, there was the acknowledgement from the organisation that they were prepared to try something new to see if it could work even though they were not quite sure of the outcome.

Even though there was a ‘change agenda’ operating in the agency, the extent and breadth of attempting to embed the change was unclear. People were resistant to the research project which came on the heels of a major restructure and review of their division so ownership and personal responsibility was very difficult to generate. The extent of including people in change that had occurred in the past was negligible and in the absence of dealing with people’s emotions, talking about the issues that change presented for them, became entrenched and could not be fixed [Carlopio 1998:19].

There was a disconnect between the organisation’s change imperative and the group’s awareness and commitment toward this change. There were few or no interventions that appeared to be operating that would support a change agenda. The impact of these observations for the group appeared to be that they were stuck and were holding tightly to their opinions, plans, identities and truths [Scott & Harker 1998:20].

The ex Director agreed that some of the key issues that the organisation needed to consider were the lack of:

- A system to reinforce the message of importance in terms of self-awareness and reflection and the importance to change behaviours and attitudes.
- A system to reinforce and manage change within self and others.
- A system to deal with ‘emotions’ particularly when people are grieving due to constant change i.e. loss of a good boss, way of doing things, a system that they were attached to.
This presupposes that the organisation is aware that it needs to take responsibility in putting in place a holistic change management approach. It also presupposes that such an approach would consider organisational areas of responsibility as well as making explicit what the organisation saw as an individual’s area of responsibility within the change agenda. These are some of the undiscussables that happen in a work environment going through change.

*Learning for the Whole Group and Project Group*

My learning for the group was that you can not make change happen if people are not ready to accept that they need to do things differently and particularly if they do not own the problem. Unless there is some imperative to allow them to see that they need to take responsibility, may be part of the problem themselves and need to participate to make change happen for the organisation it will not take place. A further insight was that everyone learns at different times and only when and if they are open to change. If there is self-interest and the ‘me’ factor operating then the likelihood of change will lessen.

Questions that remained unanswered for the group were: If performance is at the heart of a culture of success and confidence and performance feeds on itself, then why do we not manage performance better in organisations? [Moss Kanter 2004:27]. What prevents the giving and receiving of feedback? Why is there an unwillingness to openly discuss issues – rather we prefer to ‘talk around issues’ or not have the discussion at all?

*Were Results Relevant to the Local Setting?*

The ex Director confirmed that he considered the approach to the initial problem and the identification of AARs was an appropriate solution. However, he also stated that people had seemed to lose their sense of urgency to fix things that did not work. He confirmed that he felt that the outcomes and approaches during the research were relevant and applicable to the organisation but this was not shared by the project or whole group.
CRITIQUING UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

One of the notable issues raised by the ex Director in evaluation discussions was his question about having ‘truthful’ discussions. He said:

“Does truth mean we have to take responsibility?” He then asked: “If it does mean taking responsibility, is that why we seem to dread it?”

In talking about the project group and the organisation he made these observations:

- you cannot take people where they are not yet ready to go and
- the organisation had put in place imperceptible yet very strong constraints that went unnoticed and unchallenged.

Values and Culture

There seemed to be a flow-on affect between the organisation and the project group about “what we say” and “what we do” not matching up. Unity and team spirit was limited, yet the group valued open and honest behaviour and discussion. It seems that on a deeper level there was an acceptance that the group was prepared to identify new values but were not prepared to follow through and put them into practice, or question the extent the value existed. It seemed like when an organisation is out of integrity with its people there is a flow on to relationships, behaviours and attitudes. This is likened with everyone being ‘out of step’ with one another.

The other flow-on affect is a general tension and unease in the culture like: ‘Here we go again more change”. This meant that there was a sense of a ‘spiral of negativity’ that existed within people. To illustrate this point, attitudes and behaviours spiralled negatively in this manner:
Overall it seems it was a culture which did not want to question “why we work the way we do”. Change had to be suffered because it was continual – this impacted on the ability to be open to learning. It also meant that the group did not make the most of opportunities that change can present.

Polite participation does not necessarily help anyone. Challenging the groups’ norms and behaviours was not an approach that sat comfortably with them. Reliance on hierarchy, rules and regulations ‘scientific’ thinking rather than ‘people’ thinking did not help the group to ‘spread their wings’ and extend their thinking.

Powerful commitment to the tasks seemed to indicate a lesser commitment to the people issues – people issues are just all too hard. It was this notion of: if it is not practical it is not useful. Sometimes it is important to acknowledge that playing with the intangible or to play in the arena of chaos is healthy. Or, for the group to work towards feeling comfort in complexity and to trust that the journey will lead somewhere useful. All of this impacts on how the group will do business with within and without.
It also seems that it can be difficult to display leadership when the wider culture anoints a leader – that is – a Director. The unspoken message is that the ‘leader’ will show leadership and deal with problems – he/she will have all the answers. If the organisation was really interested in creating a culture of innovative leaders then they need to demonstrate this by exploring changes within the structure and bureaucracy. Equally, if the organisation was committed to improving performance they needed to demonstrate this to its people by supporting / trialling a system that may produce better results than what they had operating.

**The Impact of Attitudes and Behaviour**

Throughout the interactions with the project group there was a strong commitment to tasks but not to people. This translated into a focus on efficiency rather than longer-term effectiveness. The affect of this behaviour was that it impacts on how the group goes about doing its business and how it builds relationships with people.

Also there was a strong identification with “the way we have always done things around here”. New ways of thinking were dismissed if there was no immediate “efficiency value” detected. This demonstrated a strong strength of character and convictions however it meant in the longer term that it could also inhibit effectiveness – particularly because the organisation wanted them to be innovative. There did not appear to be any acknowledgement that you can not be innovative or show leadership unless you start to question your character and convictions.

**The Power of Reframing and Positive Positioning**

The project team had the opportunity to be poised to take control, pull themselves beyond their negative spiral and collectively agree on a new way forward. Without wanting to repeat myself: they had a mandate from the Executive that they seemed to have ignored. If they had explored this notion further they could have turned things around, reframed everything into an opportunity by recognizing that they could:
• sincerely create and live their new found values
• create a culture of openness, high performance, leadership and innovation
• seize the opportunity to take responsibility for themselves and the whole group [and thus demonstrate leadership]
• adopt an action learning approach supported by mentors and/or coaches – such a system encourages reflection, questions values, character and convictions and identifies baggage
• interrogate their history, where they’ve been and where they want to go and how they’re going to get there – create an environment of excitement, confidence and trust.

Change can be seen as opportunistic, yet the project group did not see the opportunities. Our mindset can keep us trapped because we cannot see beyond our spirals of negativity. Hence, the opportunities were lost. Action learning is an intervention which can aid in breaking down barriers to enable us to see beyond our limited patterns.

SUMMARY

This chapter discusses how validity criteria was applied to the evaluation process to aid conclusions and outcomes. A figure illustrating the overall evaluation approach was discussed to demonstrate the application of action learning and meta cycles of reflection which aided evaluation. Evaluation elements included content, process and premise questioning particularly what underlying assumptions and perspectives surfaced. Independent commentary from the ex Director of the project group reinforces the outcomes from the data and the evaluation. Summarised, the underlying assumptions and perspectives which surfaced were: value and culture inhibitors, attitudinal and behavioural blind spots and the power of reframing and positive positioning.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION
Chapter 10:

- Summarises the unique attributes associated with the project group.
- Confirms the tensions between questioning our worldview and behavioural patterns.
- Revisits environmental factors associated with large organisations.
- Discusses project outcomes and the local theory that was developed.
- Summarises the learning for the researcher, the organisation and project group members.

INTRODUCTION

The conclusion summarises the unique attributes associated with the project group. Tensions between questioning our worldview and behaviour patterns are confirmed as are the impact of environment factors in large organisations. Project outcomes and the local theory that was developed are discussed as well as the learning for the researcher, the organisation and project group members.

THE PROJECT GROUP AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

In the introduction chapter questions were posed including: Will the project group value participating in something new? Would they feel empowered by the process? Would they be able to see that in the long-run it would be useful to think about doing something differently? Do busy people want another facilitator [who probably represented more change] to come in to help them do work in
terms of performance management? These questions became pivotal in the project and whole group’s struggle to come to terms with an action learning approach that did not sit comfortably with patterns in the work environment.

The work of the division was unique and straddled the public and private sectors requiring capabilities including innovation, leadership, improved performance and an ability to be flexible and open to learning. On the one hand Executives understood the imperative underlying these capabilities, yet on the other the work environment had rules and regulations which kept employees ‘within the hedges’. The tension between control mechanisms, a constant change agenda with numerous restructures and reviews was evident. The result was people who were experiencing change fatigue, had limited time and experiencing high workloads and pressures. Under such circumstances it is unrealistic to expect employees to display innovation, leadership, flexibility and learning.

People were disconnected from their organisation due to continual attempts to recreate a sense of belonging and ownership in their work environment. Systems like performance management and professional development remained intact, without being questioned about the value they added to individuals, groups and the organisation. In the end everyone goes through the motions of filling in forms and participating in a process which ultimately does not seem to help anyone!

In gathering the rich and dense data and in grouping the emergent issues, local theory emerged. In answering the fundamental question: does performance management work in the public sector?, the answer was probably in the negative. It may work in pockets scattered across the public sector but not as a whole divisional group or organisational entity.

**QUESTIONING OUR WORLDVIEWS AND OUR BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS**

Blaming and complaining causes people to become stuck in an unending cycle of holding conversations that confirm the problem is out there with everyone else.
rather than each of us taking responsibility to do things better and or differently!
A new way of holding conversations needs to be established. Each person needs to acknowledge that their view is not the whole ‘truth’ or the only ‘truth’. Exploring similarities and differences is healthy for everyone.

If we do not know what we do not know how can we do anything to change it? If we do not acknowledge that we are stuck, if we do not have the conversations to discuss things we do not usually talk about, then nothing changes. Being stuck and resistant to change means that we continually reproduce and ‘do’ what has always been done without questioning. In this instance the group was prepared to go through the motions and repeat implementing a performance management system that did not work and did not produce useful outcomes. There was little acknowledgement that they were prepared to put a lot of time, effort and energy into something that produced negligible benefits rather than come up with a better solution!

Embedding a change ethos through action learning principles may help the group to see the patterns that were being repeated by them. Being stuck and resistant to change however limited learning and reproduces what has always been done. All that will be achieved is disconnection from the whole and dysfunctional behaviours.

PROJECT OUTCOMES AND LOCAL THEORY DEVELOPED

Local theory was developed in terms of: the mixed message factor; the ‘me’ factor; the non-performance factor; the inhibited communication factor; the blame and complain factor; the ‘stuckedness’ factor; the leadership “suppressor” factor; and the ostrich disconnect factor.

It is acknowledged that outcomes from the research are not necessarily ‘true’ for everyone. The success or otherwise of the project can be seen as a secondary issue. The process used in this project may produce useful theoretical insights
and theory that applies to this organisation and possibly help others elsewhere too.

**LEARNING FOR RESEARCHER, ORGANISATION AND PROJECT GROUP MEMBERS**

Significant learning took place for the researcher and the Director who was the project sponsor. Understanding the nature of paradigms and repetitive patterns and how they impact on people and work environments aid in helping groups with change. Experiencing a paradigm shift allows us to comprehend why defence mechanisms and entrenched behaviour leads to unquestioned resistance deep within us. Gaining a greater awareness of the self was a gift. Mentors and critical friends were able to gently challenge taken for granted behaviours, identify how the ego operates and allow for the gaining of greater insights by putting the self in other people’s shoes.

Action learning / action research is a wonderfully subversive process. Understanding how it can work and being in a position to use it again has been a highlight event.

Being given an opportunity to see the tensions within an organisation, executives, management and individuals and to gain a greater awareness of where there are gaps, areas of disconnection and why was insightful! For example, the executive wanted change but in many ways were unsure about how to make that happen. Seeking answers from external consultants will not necessarily provide the answer! Even though there was a ‘change agenda’ operating in the agency, the extent and breadth of attempting to embed the change was unclear given the resistance being displayed by people.

Another significant learning was that you can not make change happen if people are not ready to accept that they need to do things differently and particularly if they do not own the problem. Unless there is some internal imperative to allow them to see that they need to take responsibility, may be part of the problem.
themselves and need to participate to make change happen for the organisation it will not take place.
REFLEXIVE
RETROSPECTIVE
ENDNOTE
In this reflexive and retrospective end-note I attempt to delve below the surface to understand my motivations in order to further improve my practice. Having had an opportunity of some months to distance myself from ‘the doing, learning and writing’ I have tried to stand back and retrospectively look at the whole research project. In this way I hope I have sufficiently detached to take a ‘birds-eye view’ and to increase my reflexivity.

The questions posed by Reason [2001] below are used as a guide to aid in the approach to increase reflexivity:

Who am I? What is important to me? What is worthwhile engaging with? What frameworks of thinking/feeling do I bring to my life and work? What creative and distorting perspectives do I bring? Am I flexible, diplomatic and outrageous, cunning and simple, wise and foolish? Is my behaviour congruent with my purposes?

What is the quality of my behaviour? Do I have a range of behaviours appropriate to the situation? In particular, can I act in such a way as to increase the quality of the conversation? Am I flexible, diplomatic and outrageous, cunning and simple, wise and foolish? Is my behaviour congruent with my purposes?

Am I awake to what is happening within me and in the world around me? How do I act now to increase the quality of dialogue and inquiry?

Figure 38 - Source: Reason, P [2001]
His aim is to fully and thoroughly raise our self-awareness during the research process. He suggests that this can be done by using first, second and third person research and practice. Summarised, he explains this approach in these terms:

| First person research allows the researcher to become aware and mindful of their own life, to assess what is happening and make appropriate choices. |
| Second person research examines the capacity to improve “…our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern”. |
| Third person research incorporates the broader community to capture people who because of geographical or other issues are not known or included in the research. |

[Source: Reason, 2001]

Answering the questions from a first person perspective interestingly also allows an examination of the flow-on effects to second and third person research - albeit in retrospect. The process of being deeply reflexive also demonstrates insights to enable changed practice on my part and the possibility of continuing to change my practice into the future.

**WHO AM I? WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO ME?**

Masur in Zuckerman [2008:34] says “Education can sometimes prevent you from discovering yourself”; Achebe in Zuckerman [2008:24] suggests that “Nobody can teach me who I am”. Both statements challenge me to understand the self. The first seems to indicate that ‘enculturation’ through education can prevent us from knowing ourselves. The second statement seems to say that each of us must take responsibility to understand the self whatever has taken place. Contemplating such questions allowed me to realise that some of the ‘known’ values that are important to me and define who I am are to:
**MORE OF MY VALUES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Build Relationships</th>
<th>Help, Serve and Contribute</th>
<th>Learn and Grow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest, open, authentic interaction to limit game playing and hidden agendas</td>
<td>Loyalty to self and others in order to develop trust</td>
<td>Use reflection with others to see broader possibilities and choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put learning into practice for self and others</td>
<td></td>
<td>To question reified systems and behaviours that block growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Courage and determination to continue to become self-aware and aid others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 39

There are other values that are important: fairness and equity, transparency and openness, the demonstration of respect to one another and the creation of change and understanding through dialogue.

The initial reaction to my expressed values are that they are simple and clear. Yet the ‘rub’ comes in trying to demonstrate a degree of congruence between my values and actions – to try and live my truth and not just mouth the words.

Simplicity and clarity in values does not necessarily correlate to being simple to put into practice – probably the reverse. Some may say that it is practically unachievable to be constantly vigilant and aware, to determinedly show courage to attain knowledge in an endeavour to broaden thinking and to simultaneously help myself and others. For example, when I felt resistance from the greater group and project group, that was when I was least able to demonstrate understanding and put in place strategies to aid in having honest, open, authentic interaction with and for
myself and others. Nevertheless the test is to explore through reflection to identify ‘blind spots’ and unknown areas for the self and others.

**Creative Perspectives**

What creative perspectives do I bring to a project? Creative perspectives can relate to my ability to generate ideas and see possibilities and choices beyond scepticism and cynicism: to try and dream of things that could be different and again to question why it cannot be so. Is it naïve to expect that a workplace will:

- be respectful
- value difference
- value creativity?

From the research, it appears there is a struggle in demonstrating such values in a bureaucracy. Over a period of some thirty years of working in a bureaucracy does this mean that I have shut down on using my creativity? Has this happened because I believe that the environment does not appreciate or value creativity in the form of challenging what we have always done? Extending this questioning, does this mean I shut down and do not press the point too much if people become defensive? Yes, this is probably what happens.

Often the creative perspective can be used to see good in others and to work with those strengths rather than focussing on the negative: ‘working with what you’ve got and building on it’. Building on the confidence within an individual that is often hidden behind a mask has the potential to allow insights and personal growth – for me, for them, for others.

Did I allow my creativity to surface during the research project? Did I bring optimism, playfulness and happiness into the process, whether or not resistance and passive-aggressive behaviours were on display from others? Did I display confidence in the doing and taking action to help and deal with the creative blocks of others? Was I
prepared to take decisive action to resolve difficult situations and maintain effort through adversity? Or did I shut down?

Was I creative in dealing with my confusion, vacillation, distortions and incoherent thought patterns? Was I creative in thinking through my feelings when overwhelmed by emotional experience? Did I question appropriately and intensively to increase the quality of dialogue and inquiry that better represented the needs of the group? Or did I fall back on patterns of distortion and negativity? I believe there is an element of truth embedded within these questions in terms of my behaviour. I tried to be creative yet I was limited by what I knew. I was overwhelmed at times and I found it difficult to craft the questions quickly and appropriately. Some of my key learnings were:

- Learning cannot be forced – it takes place if and when we are open and receptive.
- We all need to take responsibility for our learning and our behaviour.
- We need to own our responses and reactions.
- Embracing uncertainty is part of the creative process.
- It takes discipline and patience to appreciate the creative ebb and flow within myself and others.
- Creativity cannot be forced either. We need to trust the process and not discard or dismiss the quiet imaginative voice within us all.
- A little uncertainty which generates fear can mean we do not take anything for granted and this is good!

Distorting Perspectives

Is one of my distorting perspectives what I consider to be my truth? Personal truth is important to me but how do I express it? Do I communicate my thoughts and feelings without over-emotionalism? Do I communicate my point of view openly or do I repress my thoughts and feelings due to fear of confrontation or conflict? Do I examine the possibility of how my ‘words’ have created my current reality and how I
can change those words or communication style to demonstrate more congruence with my values? Do I have a sense of whether I am in or out of touch with my truth and with the way that I communicate it? Where does the fear of communicating my truth come from?

Such questions ask me to consider whether I fear rejection. Do I fear that what I have to say will not be valued? Do I fear the knowledge that if I speak my truth my relationships will change forever? Is there a fear of taking such action because I fear I will do the wrong thing? Does this then correlate to an inability to embrace internal change and transformation although I say I value it? Has working in an environment which does not tolerate mistakes increased the fear of doing something wrong?

When I seek to challenge myself in answering such questions I feel vulnerable and exposed. If I express and acknowledge my weaknesses how will I be judged? To remove limiting ‘protective’ walls due to distrust, fear or past reactions of rejection and to acknowledge mistakes is exposing and uncomfortable! A long term critical friend suggested to undertake reflective practice you need to wear a hair shirt and use a whip! In my view if you do not challenge and question the self nothing changes. The comfort of no change for the self is not something that I value and hence it is not an option.

It is essential to admit that I do not have all the answers to these questions. I find the best way of obtaining a more realistic and balanced picture of the self is more readily achieved when undertaking reflection with critical friends and mentors that I trust. In this way I will continue to try to identify my ‘distortions’, make them more explicit to myself so as to ensure ‘what I say’ and ‘what I do’ match. At the same time, it is important to practice asking the self questions that make a difference every day. In this way I may continue growth and learning even if it’s through making mistakes.

The learning then is: critical friends and mentors are a must as are asking the self questions that make a difference every day. In taking this approach there are no mistakes, only continual critical learning.
Am I Stuck In One Frame Or The Other?

I am left with a sense that on some level I was stuck. I am also left with a sense that at the time of the research project my capacity and lucidity to communicate a vision to others in an effective way, playfully, and fearlessly, was also to some extent limited due to fear emanating from dealing with a subject matter that was unfamiliar. The task was one of breaking patterns of fear-based emotions held deeply and unconsciously within my belief systems. The question is, during the research project, did I delve deeply enough to first identify the emotion and then take action to challenge and change these patterns as vigorously as I may have liked?

Was the task of understanding my emotional patterns within relationships something that I had unwittingly overlooked in the mix because of the ‘white noise’? I liken ‘white noise’ to understanding and dealing with:

- a new way of thinking
- understanding action learning and action research [ALAR] method and practice
- group dynamics
- my own emotional response
- enculturated behaviour I had learnt over an extensive period of time, and
- juggling full-time work, a family and extended family commitments.

WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF MY BEHAVIOUR? DO I HAVE A RANGE OF BEHAVIOURS

Is my behaviour related to self-interest – do I act out of a sense of survival – do I want to impress so people think I am very clever? Do I show my interest in others and do they see my goodwill? Am I authentic with my behaviour? How am I perceived by others? Am I easily swayed by the opinions of others? Or am I secure in my own opinion, knowledge and behaviour? Do I manipulate or am I able to limit the manipulative behaviour of others?
With these questions, thoughts and feelings resonating in my mind it would seem that there were some seminal and critical moments in which I relinquished my values and responsibilities – I did not see that there were gaps between implicit actions and intent. Was this because I was unfamiliar with the ALAR approach? Was this also because I was inside the system? Was this because I was excited that I had been given access to undertake the research project and closed my mind at critical points because I felt so excited? And/or was this because I did not receive the leadership support that needed to be provided to the project for it to be successful? Or was I seen to be too aligned with the Executive’s change agenda hence the execution of the project was always going to be doomed? Was it all of the above?

The discussion below tries to answer such questions by considering:

- When did the critical and seminal moments take place?
- What were the gaps in implicit actions and intent?
- What would I do differently if I had my time over again?
- Have I acquired any wisdom from this experience and can I make it available to others now and into the future?
- What challenges arise from these insights for organisations in terms of performance, leadership and change?

Critical and Seminal Moments and the Gaps in Implicit Actions and Intent

I struggled with trying to understand why, with all the good intentions and ability to access the organisation, the intended objectives did not match the final outcomes. Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:2] identify four questions that were not only applicable to this research project but helped with answering my confusion:
Participation took place in many ways for the executive group, the whole group and the project group. One-on-one sessions were held with the Chief Executive, Executive Director and Director of the group. Sessions were held to inform the whole group and then the project group. During those sessions much effort was made to engage people and to allow for the opportunity to work together to identify a way forward in shaping a new performance management approach. Why didn’t it work? What were the missing ingredients?

Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:2] state that “…merely getting people together in a room does not ensure they’ll be productive”. They say that the research project sessions were merely “…meetings where information was broadcast from the change leaders to the general population.” They suggest that for change to be effective and sustainable in the long-term there was a need for:

…people collectively [to] explore each other’s assumptions, seek and expand common ground, shape a desired future, and jointly take ownership of the solutions to the issues at hand. [2007:2]

They also suggest that the three critical ingredients when attempting a change effort are to:

“Why was there no energy for change beyond the change proposers?

Why didn’t people “get it” that this change was ultimately for the good of everyone?

Is conflict a natural state of being when people with different needs and views get together? If so, is there a way to harness it and move forward in a productive fashion?

What could be done to create ownership of the problems and the solutions among all people involved?”

Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:2]
As can be seen, at the heart of the Change Effort Model is the issue of sustainability. Each element of the model is discussed below to aid in identifying gaps that existed during the implementation of the research project.

**Know the Situation**

The missing elements contained in ‘knowing the situation’ for the research project was that the ‘action learning, action research’ process was named. Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:46] suggest not to do this. They suggest that it is far more important to become “…intimate with the issues and their context – the culture, history, power dynamics, underlying patterns, and dissonances”.

The question is whether I sought to truly understand the interests of the greater and project group or did I think I had all the answers because I had worked in the system for such a long time?
Gaining a greater understanding of the group and its interests may have led to a better fit with the foundational approach that would be used to create a process that suited the group’s purpose. It is more likely that resistance may have lessened – they may not have been totally comfortable but perhaps they may have been more prepared to participate. This notion is best described by Arkin in Zuckerman [2008:36] when he says:

Collaboration doesn’t work when you hang on to your vision as if it’s what God is waiting to hear and learn from. But a good collaboration is when you’re willing to sacrifice and throw your own view out for something that’s more exciting, more cohesive, or more interesting. [2008:36]

Reality testing assumptions and drilling deeply into those long-held assumptions would have been a useful ‘first start approach’. For example, in a bureaucratic environment with hierarchical structures “…many ingrained practices die hard”. Exploring notions of how a command-and-control performance pattern played itself out in the greater group and project group may have helped to provide insight to what was unhelpful and what needed to be changed from the inside out [Holman, Devane and Cady, 2007:7].

Alternately, once a greater understanding of the group’s underlying patterns are gained, I may have decided not to continue with the research project because there was not a good fit between the group and an ALAR approach. This option, however, did not occur to me.

Another ‘missing ingredient’ is that unless there is some emotional attachment to change it will probably not be successful. Such attachment could have been generated with the groups by understanding their interests about how the project would have best benefited them. Emotional engagement may have been further increased if the leaders of the organisation had demonstrated their commitment – particularly when discussions were taking place with the greater and project groups. To allow me access to the organisation was insufficient demonstration of this commitment.

Carlopio [1998:17] suggests that organisations and its leaders need to understand the emotional roller coaster experienced by people when change takes place. He
suggests that if we understand and engage people's emotions it will aid discussion about assumptions and belief. It will also aid in identifying leverage points for people to come along with the change effort. Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:8] also confirm that:

Without some sort of emotional connection to critical behaviours, people can end up simply going through the motions of executing work plan tasks. This usually results in lacklustre outcomes, or projects that die a slow death. [2007:8]

Hence another missing ingredient was probably gaining an emotional connection from the executive toward the project. The executive may then have been more prepared to show visible and tangible support toward the project. The table below demonstrates the range of emotions and how such emotions can manifest positively and/or negatively in the workplace:

**EMOTIONAL MATRIX ARISING OUT OF CHANGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMOTION</th>
<th>MANIFESTATION</th>
<th>POSITIVE SYMPTOM</th>
<th>NEGATIVE SYMPTOM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Protection from hurting ourselves</td>
<td>Loss of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phobia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greatest obstacle to honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of accurate information because people are afraid of consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dread</td>
<td></td>
<td>People dig in heels and hold onto safe pre-existing belief systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Unfocused rage</td>
<td>Effective energiser and motivator</td>
<td>Blocked listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Can create energy to make change happen</td>
<td>Covert and overt aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce effort and resist change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Little or no cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Helps to: • resolve our loss</td>
<td>Reduction in effort and attempts to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>• come to grips with change</td>
<td>Perception of being alone and unsupported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-pity</td>
<td>• accept new circumstances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Jealousy | Possessiveness  
Spite  
Envy  
Unthinking  
Judgmentalism | Model and copy others  
Aspire to do more and do better  
Promotes learning, growth and acquisition of new behaviours and skills. | Prejudice and promotion toward empire-building  
Back-stabbing and bitchiness |
| Joy | Playfulness  
Spontaneity  
Laughter  
Feeling good – love and unconditional acceptance. | Helps people to learn and to grow  
Provides energy and vitality in life  
Inhibits creativity, innovation, change, energy and communication  
Not ok to be self, unsafe to explore and challenge, to take risks or to get involved. Low motivation and performance. |

Table 16 - Source: adapted from Carlopio [1998:17].

The more appropriate assumption would have been that the right people were in the room and to engage them to find the answers – in the engagement perhaps we could have more readily captured the ‘hearts and minds’ of people and made a connection that could not be easily ignored. Deep down it seems I may have been holding on to the belief that I would “provide expertise” because the group needed help and did not have the answers. In turning such thinking on its head the assumption could have been: **the answers to the problems are in the room and to ensure this message was continually reinforced in the ALAR process.** Or it may be that depending on the outcome of such discussions we may have concluded that the group was not ready to participate in the project.

Instead what happened was as the resistance kept surfacing, I continually turned to the Director and Executive for support. Engagement with the project group lessened. The project group probably felt this and participation and dialogue diminished in equal proportions.
Know the Processes

Pepin in Zuckerman [2008:110] says whoever you are "...you have to know your trade inside and out, and control it." As a novice researcher, hesitation and frustration was probably evident. Knowing what action learning and action research has to offer – what it does well and how it works in different situations would also have helped in explaining the process with the group and obtaining their buy-in and perhaps ownership of project outcomes. Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:49] also believe that:

Just as learning what another culture values prepares us to be good neighbours, working with the principles that underpin the processes helps practitioners discern the likelihood of a good relationship between them. [2007:49]

If I had been a seasoned ALAR practitioner, I would have had a greater awareness and insight into my role. Also, I would have realised that it is inevitable that change creates conflict and that it can be a vital ingredient to help move people forward. I would have planned for conflict and known when to put more responsibility on the groups, when to remain silent in the struggle, when to ‘...increase the quality of dialogue and inquiry’ [Reason, 2001]. Seasoned practitioners would more than likely instinctively know what to do, when to do it and when to stop without overdoing things.

Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:xix] confirm that we need to ask ‘burning questions’ in order to find out what those questions “…tell us about ourselves”. They also ask researchers: “What questions can we ask that will make an even bigger difference?” [2007:xix]

It seems that incrementally from fairly early in the project I stopped questioning the groups so that on some level they would accept me more readily. Had I, to some extent, become co-dependent with the groups? Given that I wanted the project to be a success, did I fear rejection and failure?
Know Yourself

Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:52] also explain that in a change effort one must be prepared for the unexpected. They strongly recommend that researchers and facilitators learn “…to center deeply in oneself” and to “…call on all aspects of your being – head, heart, body, and spirit – and by staying grounded in the purpose of the work”. [2007:52]

More importantly, they say that a researcher needs to “…stay unattached to outcomes”! This was not the case for me. I was very much attached to the outcome – I wanted it to work, I wanted to change everyone’s thinking and to help produce a new performance management system that would improve accountability and responsibility. This probably means I wanted to show people how clever I was. Being attached meant it was unlikely I would be independent and remain true to myself and ALAR principles: hence the earlier reflection about co-dependent behaviour on my part.

This seems to be central to the question raised by Reason [2001] – Who am I? Do I consider myself bigger or better than anyone else in the room? Do I understand the power I wield in the shoes of a facilitator? Did I fail to acknowledge or deny that power? Did I make assumptions early in the process that led to unrealistic expectations and unfulfilled outcomes? One thing is clear: frustration tends to increase within me when there is a conflict in values. I tend to become stuck if there are divergent values around me and I feel misunderstood.

To some extent I also believe the answer is that I failed to understand the ALAR role sufficiently well enough to engage with the groups and ensure role and responsibility clarity. I was too helpful, often I did not trust my intuition and I did not keep it simple because I thought ALAR had to be difficult otherwise more people would be using it! When the group had no answers I did more instead of less. I did not step back, breathe and allow them to take responsibility. I did not trust them or the process. I had to fill the silent space with something.
Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:59] explain that sustainability is a key issue which needs to be brought from the “back of mind” to the “front of mind”. They also explain that often the question about sustainability is asked as change is nearing the end rather than at the beginning of a project. In any endeavour they say that answering such issues at the beginning increases the likelihood of success. There were also a range of other questions beyond sustainability that were not answered or made explicit very early on in the project and these were:

**Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships**
- Are the sponsors ready to assume their responsibilities?

**Conditions for Success**
- Are the conditions for success present in our environment?
- If not, how might they be created? Is it worth the effort?

**Sustaining the Results**
- How successful is our culture in sustaining change? What would improve the odds?
- What sort of leadership and associated leadership development are required to sustain the results?

Before addressing the ‘sustainability’ issue some additional critical elements missing from the research project were:

- The Executive did not assume any responsibility nor did I make those responsibilities explicit to them.
- Executive participation was limited to me calling on them as and when I felt they were needed rather than them willingly and spontaneously demonstrating their keenness in engaging, owning and changing a performance management approach that did not work.
• The flow-on effect was the perception that there was a lack of commitment from the Executive which placed the emphasis on the fact that it was my university project.

• As I continually kept on deferring to the Executive, the second flow-on effect was the perception that I was aligned with the Executive’s change agenda. This lessened the connection with the group because I probably represented more disconnected change for them.

Questions were never posed about whether the conditions for success were present or how it might be created. Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:63] confirm that lack of time and money, ties to the status quo, perceived value of the project, and change management ignorance may mean that success conditions are not present. Some may say that given the extent of the effort expended, the project was possibly not worth it. I prefer to believe that we learn from our mistakes and failures and what seems to have not worked has the potential of success and wisdom in the longer-term. I am now aware of change elements necessary for successful project outcomes and mindful of what is missing in the process.

For example, turning to the issue of sustainability, Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:61] claim that organisations that have a learning-supportive environment are more likely to implement change more rapidly and successfully. The research identified that learning was disconnected from the whole and further identified that the group was struggling with dealing with the constant change. Therefore this was not a good climate to attempt an ALAR approach.

Another fundamental ingredient to success is that change leaders are “...clear about their true intentions” and act “...with integrity in carrying out those intentions” [2007:8]. It is unclear whether the leaders involved in the research project had a clear understanding of the common and essential elements needed for change. For example during report back sessions there was resistance around the table and it seemed as if there was limited active support for the plans and improvements being attempted by the research project. Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:13] again confirm that:
Leaders – at all levels – of organisations and communities also need to focus on actively supporting the plans and improvements achieved during the event.

The common essential elements needed for change as discussed by Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:12] are:

- Contributing to a meaningful purpose compels people into action
- The power of individual contribution is unleashed
- The whole person, head, heart, and spirit, is engaged
- Knowledge and wisdom exist in the people in the organisation or community
- Information is cocreated by members of the organisation or community
- The method creates a whole system view among members of the organisation or community
- Change is a process, not an event

Holman, Devane and Cady [2007:66] also advocate that for sustainability and success of a change effort it is important to have a plan for the beginning, middle and the end of a project. These elements are described in the diagram below:

**Figure 41 - Source: Homan, Devane and Cady, 2007:66**
There appears to have been a number of missing factors which affected the implementation of the research project: these varied from culture, to leadership, to role clarity, measurement and support. These factors are summarised in the table below in this way:

### Missing Context and Facilitation Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Task driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited learning culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Diffuse roles</td>
<td>Poor management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of team roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of understanding of change methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Absence of audit and peer review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitation</strong></td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Lack of clarity of change process and access and authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was apparent during the research project was that there were a number of disconnects within the organisation which had flow-on effects to the issue of sustainability. As previously mentioned, the culture was one of being task-driven, morale was low, participants felt cynical about the performance management system, learning was not linked to a change agenda, the status quo was a priority and change was resisted. Given the inability to generate some emotional engagement it seems this too added to the odds being against a successful project outcome.

### Importance of Communication

Although communication has not been a discussion point so far, it is another critical component within the mix. Andrewartha [2002:5] confirms that:
We need to understand others, in depth, genuinely. Understanding is connection and influence.

He also says that if given in an appropriate manner feedback “…has a dramatic effect upon the level of motivation” [2002:209]. The giving of appropriate and timely feedback can also aid in the development of relationships and that important ingredient: trust.

Moss Kanter [2004:81] also confirms that one solution is a dialogue as an intervention. If we do not trust the organisation and the hierarchy will we be honest and have the open discussions that we need to have? Probably not. Kets de Vries [2001:208] points out that “…trust is a very delicate flower – one that takes a long time to blossom and is easily crushed…”.

Therefore, proper communication was also a missing ingredient – unless assumptions were challenged, unless trust was engendered, unless a shared understanding resulted, then the odds were against successful project outcomes. It is doubly difficult to create such communication if the culture and climate is one of distrust where open and honest discussions are not evident. There seem to have been skill gaps and knowledge gaps in a number of areas:

- skill gap in change management for me and the leadership/executive group
- understanding cultural and environmental issues and possible impact on research project outcomes
- misunderstanding in group dynamics
- skill gaps in ALAR practices and processes
- and limited ownership, collaboration or engagement on a number of levels.

**What Would I do Differently?**

Whole system change is complex and it is important to understand that it is “…characterised by cooperation” [Holman, Devane and Cady, 2007:52]. Creating
opportunities for people to learn together and partnering with other consultants, helps people who want to find answers and support. This only seems to apply if we really want to find out the answers!

If I had my time over again to do things differently what would it look like? Here is a list of some acquired wisdom for me:

- You will probably get better results if you are an ‘outsider’ to the organisation as you can more readily have the challenging discussions required for sustainability of the research project.
- Just because you are ‘inside’ the entity do not take for granted or assume you know the culture, sub-culture, history, power dynamics, underlying patterns and dissonances.
- Suspend judgement wherever possible.
- Obtain tangible ‘buy-in’ from leaders so they provide ‘active’ and demonstrable support throughout the project. Be prepared to ‘name it’ if ‘buy-in’ is not taking place and renegotiate support when needed!
- Factor in ‘sustainability’ when negotiating the project.
- Ask leaders to ‘clear people’s plates’ so they have the ability to participate.
- Ensure the roles and responsibilities of leaders and project group members are very explicit – continually reinforce those messages where necessary. Name uncooperative behaviour if required.
- As far as possible limit assumptions before meeting with a project group and do not ‘force’ or have any preconceived ideas about a type of methodology.
- Gain a greater understanding of the group and its interests. Ensure meetings “explore each other’s assumptions and shape a desired future”.
- Reality test ownership to make sure there is authentic ‘buy-in’ and people understand what it is that needs to be achieved and by whom.
- Capture peoples’ hearts and minds, engage their emotions in the change agenda.
- Plan for conflict and struggle.
• It is human nature to take the path of least resistance: to conform, to agree, to go around a problem and to maintain the status quo. Be aware of this and ensure there is discussion and interventions to help lessen the effect of this behaviour or name it and shame it! Ubuntu [2008:35] quotes John F Kennedy as saying: “Conformity is the jailor of freedom and the enemy of growth”.

• Increase the quality of dialogue and enquiry by asking burning questions, creating discomfort, engendering more straight talk, being silent, expecting members to take responsibility and show ownership.

• Ensure the process includes open, honest, transparent feedback processes for all participants.

• Understand the outcomes of the process being used and explain it in practical terms to project group members.

• As far as possible, be prepared for the unexpected – know that it will happen.

• Stay grounded and centred in an environmental whirlwind of change and emotion.

• Stay unattached to the outcomes.

• Do not create unrealistic expectations within yourself – not everyone will ‘get it’.

• Do not create unrealistic expectations within others – they have to take responsibility and do some work too.

• Ensure there is evidence of environmental conditions of success otherwise do not proceed with the project. Be prepared to walk away sooner rather than later.

• Understand yourself, understand your values and become aware of how this may impact on dialogue, generating strategies and being open to the views of others who are part of the research.

Here is a list of some of the acquired wisdom for the organisation and the research groups. Organisations and groups need to:
• Provide tangible ‘buy-in’ by leaders demonstrating ‘active’ support throughout the project.

• Be prepared to be open and flexible in changing the parameters of the project.

• Be open to understanding and implementing appropriate change management practices and systemic approaches to aid the project as required.

• Factor in ‘sustainability’ when negotiating the project at the beginning of the project – do this by ‘clearing people’s plates’ so they have the ability to meaningfully participate.

• Commit to the roles and responsibilities of leaders and project group members – continually reinforcing messages of commitment and naming uncooperative behaviour.

• Be unequivocal in demonstrating ownership and authentic ‘buy-in’ and ensure people understand what it is that needs to be achieved.

• Capture peoples’ hearts and minds and engage their emotions in the change agenda.

• Plan for conflict and struggle and demonstrate commitment to the project during these stages.

• Understand how systemic disconnections can impact on culture, performance, leadership and morale [see diagram below].
It is also important to paint a positive picture that demonstrates the connection points rather than the organisational disconnections. A diagram below reframes the negative picture provided above:
CONCLUSIONS

Why did the project fail? One of the primary reasons is because of the culture. There was a defensive climate - a climate of them and us – management and staff. There was unhappiness with the extent of continual change. There was lack of trust and suspicion about what was going on and the sub-text for the whole and project groups was probably: what’s really going on here? How are they trying to ‘get’ to us? Or putting it crudely: how are they trying to screw us? The groups probably thought that the Executive was just using me as a mechanism to create a smokescreen to ‘get to them’.

As a result of the climate of lack of trust and suspicion, my words had no real meaning for the group. Their perception of the process was the research project was a ‘ploy’ by management to manipulate them into doing something they did not want to participate in. ALAR, participation and cooperation were probably words...
they considered as ‘rhetoric’. The undertone for the groups was: here we go again what are they planning to do this time. There was probably a perception that I was the agent for the Executive and in any event, the project was something I was doing for me – it was ‘my’ study – and had nothing really to do with them.

By me continually jumping in and trying to do things and fix things, it probably reinforced such negative views. Coupled with the fact that I did not sufficiently delve into the groups’ assumptions it was probably a clear underlying message that they were being given permission not to own the project. Under such circumstances creating engagement was an impossible task.

There is no doubt that a group needs to be open and to be prepared to be engaged in the process and this group did not fall into this category. It would have been interesting if I had done some ‘scouting and researching’ to see if I could ‘light some spot fires’ of commitment and engagement with some people first, and whether the outcome would have been different if I had taken such an approach. For example, if there was some interest and eagerness with some key stakeholders within the group, then the project may have taken a different turn. As it turned out the groups and I were both walking on different roads which never coalesced!

I should have walked away from the project a lot earlier than I did. My determined continuation of the project probably just reinforced the defensiveness and the negativity and the perception that there was some other management agenda operating. The less I was able to detach the more the project ‘owned’ me.

Why did I have such difficulty in walking away from the project? I think my ego got in the way. I had invested a considerable part of myself in the project. As the project continued my investment became larger. As my investment grew the harder it became for me to walk away from the project. The stronger the commitment became not to fail, the greater the guarantee became of one of failure. I attribute this to two main issues: fear of failure and the fact that I have been part of the system for such an extensive period of time. This is learnt behaviour. Primary learning of some 34 years or so meant I too have the characteristics of a defensive climate within me. Wherever there is limited trust and openness we learn to survive by:
• Carefully editing our conversations
• Ensuring we do not expose our weaknesses
• Fearing the consequences of how something may be used against us.

I have been unable to answer all the questions I have raised in the endnote. Scattered throughout the endnote I have attempted to address some questions as the reflection progressed. Another key learning for me has been that I can now give myself permission to keep on thinking about such questions and that I do not feel compelled to answer all of them at the one time. I also give myself permission to continue to work on answering these and other questions and to continue to learn. In this way I may be able to help others.
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*Training and Development in Australia*, 9-15


Mr XXXX  
Director  
XXXXXXX  
DARWIN  NT.  0801

Dear XXXX

Re: Implementation of the XXXX Review

Thank you for allowing me to assist with the implementation of the XXXX Review.

 Undertaking this project is a major element of my Doctor of Business Administration [DBA] studies and it precedes my doctoral thesis. Your agreement means I will be able to complete the preliminary work prescribed in the DBA.

By way of background, I thought it would be useful to provide you with some information about the action learning managerial skills project. Action learning is becoming a powerful management development strategy internationally. True managerial learning therefore comes from acting on a real organisational problem or issue, hence action and learning. The framework for the assignment comprises:

1. Identifying a ‘corporate sponsor’ who can authorise the project, who is prepared to give the student access to the organisation, and who is prepared to assess the outcome of the action learning project.

2. Identifying a ‘problem owner’, someone [or group] who is experiencing the problem or issue and is willing to work with me to help manage the problem – bearing in mind the project is a real change process which will have affects on the organisation.

3. Clarifying arrangements to facilitate the project such as the degree of access and degree of support, and mutual expectations etc.

4. You [as Corporate Sponsor] drafting a letter to my Graduate School confirming your willingness to support the action learning project and to be involved in assessing its affects in the organisation.

5. Me, drafting a proposal report and a final report [20,000 words, detailing the outcomes of the project] due January 2005. The reports are presented to representatives of the Graduate School and the organisation for verbal assessment.

It is important to note that the researcher in an action learning project is not considered an expert. Also research participants are not subjects of research – they are co-researchers who own and self manage the problem. Action learning is a tool that assists managers to develop innovative ways of managing, possibly ways that they had not previously considered.

T Lambert  
June 2009
The terms of reference agreed to in our preliminary meetings on 23 August and 27 August are outlined below.

**Terms of Reference**

- Develop a work plan that will describe program design phases, methodology and proposed timing.
- The methodology will include a consultation process with stakeholders and the facilitation of a series of work group sessions with XXXX staff.
- Develop a final review reporting mechanism and change management approach and templates that will suit XXXX staff. The change management methodology will also consist of accelerated individual learning programs and have the capacity to create improved team capability.

**Project Inclusions**

- Critical assessment and suitability of review reporting mechanisms and processes
- Identification of possible risk areas for the Director XXXX
- Obtain XXXX staff “buy-in”
- Targeted consultations with staff
- Develop a simplified and high-level review reporting mechanism and change management approach
- Final report to the Chief Executive

**Project Exclusions**

- The development of investment criteria for your department – this will be done as a separate exercise.

Again, thank you for allowing me to assist with the implementation of the XXXX Review and I look forward to working with you and others in XXXX and XXXX.

Yours sincerely

TINA LAMBERT
October 2004

Copy to: Chief Executive and Executive Director
**APPENDIX TWO**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE XXXX REVIEW**

Work Plan with XXXX in XXXX [with agreement from the Chief Executive and the Executive Director].

3 October 2004

The following is a proposal to implement the recommendations emanating from XXXX Review, in particular to facilitate the development of an overall reporting mechanism and assist with change and people management recommendations.

The proposal outlines a work plan, approach and timetable to undertake an action learning project as described in the terms of reference prescribed in the attached covering letter.

### Work Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One – Project Initiation</td>
<td>A. Develop Work Plan and submit to XXXX</td>
<td>Tina Lambert with assistance from the Director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Entry Interview – Tina Lambert and Chief Executive [including separate briefings with the Executive Director and Director] to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ clarify Terms of Reference for the project;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ finalise the approach and methodology;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ agree on representatives in XXXX to work with;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ finalise milestones and deliverables; and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ T Lambert to provide final report to the Chief Executive and Executive Director.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two - Identify Options in relation to Reporting Mechanisms and Processes.</td>
<td>A. Examine the Review of XXXX and identify reporting mechanism options.</td>
<td>Tina Lambert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Distribute information to XXXX staff and undertake individual staff meetings to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ discuss review requirements, identify issues and create staff ownership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ elicit views on preferences to address staff needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ consult broader if necessary within XXXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Collect feedback from the Chief Executive,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain XXXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three - Conduct series of one hour work group sessions with XXXX staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Determine issues to be discussed with staff and obtain agreement from Director.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Conduct three, one hour work group sessions with XXXX staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Achieve following outcomes as a result of work group sessions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A simplified, high-level review reporting mechanism [recommendation no.11].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An overall change management methodology that includes Personal Development Plans and accelerated individual learning programs [recommendation 12].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A method to create improved team capability to deliver on XXXX projects and programs and governance structures/systems [recommendation 13].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four - Analyse and Report on Consultations and Workshop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Analyse information from work group sessions and conduct Feedback Session with XXXX representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Develop Final Review Reporting Mechanism and Change Management Approach and Template(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Distribute Final Process and Template(s) to XXXX group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Report back to Director and Executive Director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Provide a final report to Chief Executive of XXXX.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tina Lambert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
## PROPOSED TIMETABLE AND SUGGESTED DATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>One – Project Initiation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Workplan Developed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd workplan developed on 3/10/04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30/8/04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two – Identify options in relation to reporting mechanisms &amp; processes and obtain XXXX staff “buy-in”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Identify reporting mechanism options</td>
<td></td>
<td>9/10/04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Distribute information to XXXX staff and conduct individual meetings to:</td>
<td></td>
<td>11/10/04 [subject to staff availability]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discuss review requirements, identify issues and create staff ownership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elicit views on preferences to address staff needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consult broader if necessary within XXXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Collect feedback from Executives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Make amendments as required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Summarise data collected.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three – Conduct workshop with XXXX work group.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Determine issues to be discussed with staff and obtain agreement from Director.</td>
<td></td>
<td>14/10/04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Conduct three, one hour work groups sessions with XXXX staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>21/10/04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Four – Analyse and Report on Consultations and Workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Analyse information from staff sessions and conduct Feedback Session with XXXX.</td>
<td>29/10/04</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Develop Final Review Reporting Mechanism &amp; Change Management Approach and Template(s).</td>
<td>3/11/04</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Distribute information to XXXX.</td>
<td>3/11/04</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Report back to Director and Executive Director</td>
<td>12/11/04</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Provide final report to CEO, XXXX.</td>
<td>15/11/04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL HOURS**  
51
APPENDIX 3

**XXXX Reviewed Work Plan**

On 6 December 2005, after reporting back to the Chief Executive on a Performance Planning model created with XXXX Management Group and staff, other options and interventions where put up for consideration. The Chief Executive gave his agreement to the project continuing and to piloting After Action Reviews, a process to assist with change and people management issues. The proposal below summarises a work plan to undertake the project as discussed with key stakeholders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **One – Project Initiation**  | Meet with new Chief Executive  
Meet with Executive Director  
Meet with Director and XXXX Management Group to:  
- clarify project Terms of Reference;  
- clarify issues and opportunities currently facing XXXX and XXXX  
- identify possible events/issues for discussion during After Action Reviews  
- finalise approach and methodology;  
- obtain any relevant background information.  
Introduce topic of After Action Reviews to XXXX staff at XXXX being held in February 2006. | Tina Lambert |
| **Two - Facilitate After Action Review Discussions.** | Identify After Action Review groups through XXXX Management Group.  
Process to hold After Action Reviews:  
- choose an event/crisis/success that already has people’s attention or  
- choose an event or issue that needs planning i.e. What are we going to do? What outcomes do we want to achieve? Why are we doing this?  
- bring together all people who need to be involved in discussion and not those who have no interest  
- ensure confidentiality can be provided | Tina Lambert |
### key discussion points.

- use an inclusive process and acknowledge everyone’s voice
- use discipline and rigorous questioning e.g.
  1. How are we currently adding value?
  2. How do I make a personal contribution?
  3. If I/we stopped doing what we are doing what would happen?
  4. What just happened?
  5. Why do we think it happened in that way?
  6. What can we learn and do differently?

Get people who aren’t talking to each other in the same room.

Process allows people to go beyond their own opinions.

Information can lead to something – I was listened to! Trust can develop from experience.

Summarise data collected.

### Three - Analyse and Report on After Action Reviews.

- Analyse information.
- Summarise information into clear groupings and identify possible options and interventions.
- Report back to XXXX Management Group and Chief Executive through Executive Director

Tina Lambert
Appendix 4
APPENDIX 4.2

PEOPLE/ENVIRONMENT/
GROUP ISSUES

WE ARE TOO BUSY
WE HAVE NO RESOURCES
TIME IS SCARCE
JUST GIVE US THE ANSWER

EASY TO CRITICISE
BUT WHERE ARE NEW SOLUTIONS?

ALL CARE
NO RESPONSIBILITY

WANT A PERFORMANCE
SYSTEM THAT HELPS
WITH MY PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT!

WHAT ABOUT
GREATER GOOD?

WHAT'S IN IT
FOR ME

WE'RE UNABLE TO GENERATE
NEW IDEAS OR BLUE SKY THINKING

OPEN-MINDEDNESS?

LIMITED FLEXIBILITY

SELF-UNAWAVERED TO CHANGE BEHAVIOUR

DIFFICULT LEADERSHIP/INHIBITIVE

IMPROVE PERFORMANCE 
 Те агравиды

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP

IN OTHER AREAS
TOO?

T Lambert
June 2009
## APPENDIX FIVE

### CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 July 2004</td>
<td>Met with Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 August 2004</td>
<td>Met with Executive Director and Director and People and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/9/04</td>
<td>Met with Director People and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/9/04</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/10/04</td>
<td>Met with Director of People and Learning and Director of Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/10/04</td>
<td>Met with Director of People and Learning and Director of Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/12/04</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/12/04 [7am]</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/12/04</td>
<td>Director emails XXXX staff saying I was assisting with implementation of the review. Pointed out I was not an expert. We were co-researchers who own and self-manage the process. And I would send out CV. I also send out an email saying I would explain AL term, give background to project, assist with performance management system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/12/04</td>
<td>Met with Alice Springs Staff – have notes about Action Learning discussions. Asked questions about performance management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/12/04</td>
<td>Met with Darwin Staff – have notes about discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/1/05</td>
<td>Email from Director acknowledging ‘reluctant’ participants, inviting me to present to NT Group Session in February 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2/05</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>Participated in NT Group Session – have recorded reflections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/4/05</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/5/05</td>
<td>Report Back to XXXX group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/05</td>
<td>XXXX performance management meeting – 3rd floor HVP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Meeting Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/8/05</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/8/05</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10/05</td>
<td>Met with XXXX group – finalising rollout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/12/05</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group – gave advice in terms of language in presentation – and different ‘spin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/12/05</td>
<td>Presentation to Executive which included Report Back.  Chief Executive and Dr Murray Redman present.  Agreed to a new Work Plan and AAR process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/1/06</td>
<td>Met with Chief Executive – emailed him outcomes of meeting on 8/2/06.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/2/06</td>
<td>NT Group Session Meeting – report back to the whole group of outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/2/06</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group – outcomes email 27/2/06.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5/06</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/6/06</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/8/06</td>
<td>Planning Session with Management Group – outline sent by Director 14/8/09.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/9/06</td>
<td>XXXX management group meeting – expectations, values, project management, performance management process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/10/06</td>
<td>XXXX management group meeting – belbin – strengths and weaknesses, how the group wants to work – values, project management, performance, risk management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/10/06</td>
<td>Met with Executive Director and Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/10/06</td>
<td>XXXX management group meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/10/06</td>
<td>Met with Chief Executive, Executive Director and Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/10/06</td>
<td>Moorish – Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/12/06</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/12/06</td>
<td>Met with Director of Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CRITICAL FRIENDS/MENTOR MEMOS

First Example

Government only wants you to do what is important for them today because they are highly attuned to the political environment – actually acutely sensitive to the political environment.

Government is not interested in risks – they want to be seen to be responsive.

My Question: Isn’t that knee jerk? Or short-term?

People in politics are not driven by making this a better place to live. They are driven by being re-elected. Don’t have to leave a legacy. Example: there was no debrief of the Clare Marin government or style or outcomes.

Government is only interested in managerial politics as opposed to leadership politics.

NT Government is about allowing people to discover problems and then fix them. With John Howard you knew where he stood and he got some things done. Greenhouse – he wanted it broken then it will get fixed. Howard was stuck in an age paradigm. Younger people know that you can’t afford to take the risk with greenhouse gas emissions and the impact on the environment.

Another factor that led to Howard’s downfall because of the approach to fixing what is important today, was WorkChoices. The number of unpaid hours of work is quite acute in Australia, with WorkChoices it also took away other benefits so it became even more acute for people.
A similar dilemma we’re facing is the language we choose to use in our organisations. For example, your working week is 36 ¾ hours and you may be required to work additional hours. Instead of actually, you will be required to work additional hours. So there’s no honesty about this or many other important things in our relationships.

What we often don’t point out to people is that they will need to commit to a 10 to 12 hour day to their organisation. When you work it out, people start out at 7am or 7.30am and often don’t get home until about that time in the evening.

**Organisations have lost track of the human dimension.** We are knowledge workers and we’re employed for our brain – our thinking, analytical abilities, the extent of which is dependant on our emotional state.

We actually need a blend of positivist and constructivist approaches but we don’t have the conversations. Perhaps if we talked about it and got the grounding then we could relax into chaos and complexity. We don’t feel safe to have that sort of working environment.

On the one hand we want new blood from the private sector – high flyers – or people with different ways of thinking and then we’re limited by:

1. Where are my risks?
2. How do I satisfy my political masters?
3. I only have this number of resources so I’m limited to managing areas where there is a problem?
4. The knowledge that there’s a lack of accountability for delivering results.
5. What do I do when there’s an immediate, managerial approach to everything – we want you to fix it now?
6. Where have all the leaders gone?
7. Why aren’t we talking about the missed opportunities?
My Question: Professional development seems disconnected from the organisation? NTPS does not appear to value or do anything with the people they help in this way. They don’t seem to value the qualification or they consider some employees over qualified, why?

There’s a line in the budget allocation and we spend the budget that we have in that allocation. Generally there’s an ideology that education and training is good because it offers a benefit to the workforce. So there’s some reflective glory for the organisation i.e. look at us, we’re a good organisation because we do these things.

Again we don’t look at outcomes.

The test is: Does the education and training reflect the individual’s needs or the organisation’s that they are in? What is the net tangible benefit for the organisation? If there is no connection, then it will not be used.

I’ll now answer the over qualified part of your question.

Often you will be more qualified than the person you answer to – there will be a fear issue involved there. Formal qualifications are increasingly more theoretical. They don’t teach how to value add with the knowledge you gain. There is no link about where and how the person can add value for the employer. Organisations aren’t interested in ideas [noble endeavours], they are interested in outcomes.

Management’s experience has been that qualified people are strong on theory and much weaker on implementation. There’s no such thing as a perfect theory.

You need to start where you want to be and figure out how we’re going to get there now. We don’t define problems properly we need to reverse engineer problem. University is parallel thinking – systems approach. Theoreticians use
indirect action rather than direct action. Direct action should be able to identify as close as possible the outcome you want – six degrees of separation, in six steps you can find someone or find outcome.

The public sector does not value change management. The cost of replacing an employee is about $10k. If you lose ten employees the opportunity cost is $100k…. No-one in the public sector is prepared to pay for change management. Having an internal HR consultant who can remind me of tune-ups would be good.

People just need to do what they’re told to do.

CRITICAL FRIENDS/MENTOR MEMOS

Second Example

Motivation and commitment are personal qualities not organisational responsibilities. How people take responsibility and how organisational rewards the taking of responsibility is where you run up against a brick wall.

People take, take, take. There is a mismatch between organisations and people. We tinker with strategy and staff. Look at corporate failures i.e. ENRON – the management style in that company was similar to the NTPS.

The best question you can ask people is: What business are you in? Are you a passenger on the bus without ever looking at the map?

You can’t control every element in an organisation – it can be dictatorial and passively resistant. And there are sycophants. When you’re at the top you surround yourself with people who will do what you ask. You prefer a professional team rather than a team of professionals. Diversity of thought is distracting and annoying.
There is a drive and passion to get things done and not have failures. Deal and control the things you can. Things are not fair.
HR MEMO ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Chief Executive was a great advocate of performance management and wanted it in place. He really felt it was important for the organisation and people. At that time the department had less than 3,000 staff so we all felt it was doable.

1700 people went through training so it was a very real and big investment in resources and $$. Two day training programs were instigated. We had HR consultants train whole work units. But it never got off the cycle. It was implemented from the top down. It all became very fragmented in implementation after top level training was completed. Some of the problems were:

- Some people did not have clear authority to performance manage others
- Some workers were in co-ops so and were at the same level as one another
- It was threatening for people particularly if they were in conflict with their supervisor
- Some managers knew they were not going to be around for the next cycle – so why do it?
- Many asked - Who is really my manager?
- Or, you’re not from my professional stream so you can’t performance manage me.
- Even though it was sold as a development agenda, the turnover was so great it didn’t work.
- Employees felt there was too much ambiguity and ambivalence
- They said who has the right to tell me what to do – you don’t have the authority to do this or I don’t recognise you as my manager.
- There was a culture of no-one accepting responsibility – in some areas, everyone went on leave at the same time.
- Feedback was not possible
- It helped with performance development
- But not possible for helping with performance.
- Little stability in system of immediate supervisors and workers – high levels of turnover.
- It was driven by staff in some areas
- Some employees saw it as beneficial and the development linkage was attractive.
- In pockets it can work – for process people where there are clear outputs then performance is easy to determine objectives. Process people respond to positions of authority. Experts/professionals seemed to be discrediting the process wherever they could.
- Too many different types of levels of professionals.

Overall the system was not being reinforced by senior managers – there was a sense of “Avoiding Pain” which is short sighted. It has just been kicked off again in the last year and HR are training areas in the new system. There’s little ownership and its not working again! Why do we keep on doing this? Performance management has a bad reputation because at times it is also used inappropriately.
What’s in the Presentation

- Process and Deliverables
- Change Management & Performance Management System Story
- Observations – people & organisations
- My learning & possible implications for organisations
- “So What” Questions... Suggestions.....

Project Group Review

- Increase strategic approach
- Remove barriers to investment
- Attract investment
- Improve stakeholder relationships
- Improve marketing & promotion
- Restructure
- Financial systems
- Project management system
- Leadership and improving capability **
Deliverables....

- **Work Plan Template for 2005/06**
  - Individual or with team
  - Monthly or fortnightly
- **Six-monthly Performance Planning Form**
- **Summary of Project Group Training Needs**
  - Individual needs
  - Project Group needs

**Process**

- Process of Consultation
- Action Learning

**2005 Group Session**

- Consultation with Allen & Darwin Staff

**Leadership**
- Strategic Perspective
- Leadership in terms of people and work

**Performance Management & Departmental Values**

- **Achievement of Outputs/Results**
  - Contribution to team achievements
  - Record of achievement

- **Corporate Contribution**
  - Corporate Awareness
  - Involvement & Influence
  - Sharing Expertise

- **Client Interaction**
  - Identify needs
  - Meet needs
  - Develop new ventures

- **Learning**
  - Developing professional technical skills, self in line with values and others

- **Management**
  - Managing self
  - Managing others
  - Managing work
  - Negotiating and influencing
Values

- Values are deeply embedded.
- Some are so deep we don’t know they exist.
- How do we embed values in people?
- Is it possible to do this?

Disconnect b/w people, work the system → Lip Service & Tick-a-box → Focus on filling in A form

Passively aggressive

Resistant

Fearful & cynical

System delivers very little

People’s Perceptions + Expectations of system

Feedback & Timing

Structured vs Unstructured

Inadequate or unfair rewards

Personal Learning & Possible Implications for Organisations

Personal Learning?
- I don’t like change – need some discomfort or change won’t happen
- Fear of starting something new, looking foolish and failing
- Awareness of self – limits externalising problem
- Importance of trust or good working relationships

Implications for Organisations?
- How do we get people to embrace change as a normal way of doing business?
- Move beyond fear to challenge tradition and look for better ways of doing things?
- What do we have in place to help create self-awareness?
- No trust = unhealthy and unproductive workplace.
So What?

- If we cannot just rely on performance management systems to improve individual and organisational performance......

- If we want to embed values to change behaviour....

- If we want our people to be self-managing, show initiative and leadership....

- Are there other tools or techniques that underpin a performance management system, individuals and organisation....?
Two Suggestions

After Action Reviews
- Facilitated ongoing professional discussion
- Used for change process, introduction of new systems, after each identifiable event in a project
- It’s a live learning process
- It is not a critique – doesn’t judge success or failure
- Attempts to discover why things happened
- Develops employees – trust - ideas

Communities of Practice
- Self-organizing or Sponsored
- Discuss problems encountered and solutions devised
- Recurring, nagging problems situated in a process or function
- Not a quick fix short-term solution
- Stimulates interaction – builds relationships
- Fosters learning for all
- Creates and shares best practice

Summary
- No answers – No quick fix
- Just options for consideration
- Where have I added value?
  - Performance Management System - WIP
  - Asking some questions
  - Generating options
  - Making some suggestions
- Any Questions??
External Group
Performance Management Cycle/Model

Performance Planning and Review Cycle
- Annual Cycle
- Work Programs
- Unit Plans
- Individual Work Plans
- Several review periods

Under Performance Mechanism
- Contribution to:
  - Team achievements
  - Results/outputs
  - Leadership
  - Client & Corporate

Specifically Designed Training Programs
- Management & leadership skills
- Team Management System
- Mobility & Exchange

Workforce Planning Kit
- Succession management
- Merit advancement - linked to pay
- Performance Awards

T Lambert
June 2009
**BELBIN GROUP PROFILE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Highest Score</th>
<th>2nd Highest Score</th>
<th>3rd Highest Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Shaper - 15</td>
<td>Co-ordinator - 14</td>
<td>Team Worker - 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>TR</td>
<td>Implementer - 15</td>
<td>Completer Finisher - 15</td>
<td>Resource Investigator - 12</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>Plant - 15</td>
<td>Team Worker – 15?</td>
<td>Coordinator - 9</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Team Worker - 16</td>
<td>Plant - 12</td>
<td>Implementer &amp; Co-ordinator - 11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>GA</td>
<td>Implementer - 27</td>
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<td>Team Worker – 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Completer Finisher - 15</td>
<td>Implementer and Team Worker - 12</td>
<td>Monitor Evaluator - 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Shaper - 16</td>
<td>Plant - 15</td>
<td>Implementer – 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>MA</td>
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<td>Monitor Evaluator - 11</td>
<td>Team Worker - 10</td>
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**ANALYSIS OF BELBIN PROFILE FOR XXXX**

*Shaper [at the time of the analysis – GA had not completed Belbin – he is the second shaper]. The XXXX currently only has one shaper and that person will be leaving soon. A shaper issues tasks and is most likely to be the actual leader of the team. They challenge the team and give shape to the application of the team’s efforts. They look for ways to unite ideas, objectives and practical considerations and push to make decisions and take actions.*

1. If there is no shaper in the team, does it present a risk for the team?
2. If yes, what are the risks and how will the team manage/minimize risks?
Team Worker [at the time of the analysis – Masood had not completed Belbin]
Eight out of nine members have a strong ‘Team Worker’ focus. They are aware of the needs and worries of people in the team. They are the most active internal communicator; likeable, popular, unassertive. They are the cement in the team. They are a promoter of unity and harmony, they counter-balance the friction and discord that may be caused by the Shaper and the Plant. They particularly dislike personal confrontation and tend to try and avoid it themselves. They are uncompetitive.

1. Does this present any problems to the group?
2. Will decisions be taken within the group to limit discord and friction?
3. How will the team manage “group think” a concept whereby members will do nearly anything to agree internally rather than challenge its internal members?

Implementer
There are six members who have a high implementer profile. Sudden change upsets them because they are liable to flounder in unstable, quickly changing situations. Sometimes they are a little inflexible and unresponsive to speculative ‘airy-fairy’ ideas that do not have a visible immediate bearing on the task at hand. They can also be over-competitive for team status.

1. What impact can this have on the team?
2. Is it a problem for XXXX?
3. What are some of the strategies that can be used to minimize any risks?

Overall comments – there seems to be a general mix of outward looking traits i.e. co-ordinator, plant, resource investigator, shaper, specialist with inward looking traits i.e. implementer, monitor evaluator, team worker, finisher. Belbin also confirms that people often have ‘secondary’ team roles that can double up to perform two of the functions. Each ‘trait’ comes into its own depending on the stage of project work. It is however, important to get the right “balance” when the team operates in areas of rapid change, pressure and a need for quick decision-making!! This seems to apply to XXXX!
STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES OF TEAMS
[discussed during the session on 17 August 2006]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions valued</td>
<td>Lack of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take other’s perspectives into account in decision-making</td>
<td>Indecisiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill and expertise of group used</td>
<td>Inward looking – mutual admiration society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge others</td>
<td>Not managing high maintenance members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work cohesively with others</td>
<td>Focus is on maintaining relationships rather than achieving outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving better outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

T Lambert
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