"The evaluation of management development using a choice-based consultancy tool - exploring the relevance of the learning organisation model."

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Abstract

This Doctor of Education thesis uses Action Research to address the means which organisations can use to evaluate the impact of management development on their organisations. The author has devised a choice-based consultancy tool, the Yates Options Model for Evaluation which, amongst other things, incorporates the concept of the learning organisation as a key element and, using action research procedures, the thesis explores and confirms the value of this concept in the process of evaluating organisational effectiveness. By using the consultancy tool to carry out evaluation in two organisations, one public and one private, insights are drawn into the consultancy process itself, the value of the Model and the way in which action research serves to illuminate both. Each organisation made its choices within the Model and studies of staff opinion were carried out to establish where the organisation lay in terms of the development of the learning organisation. All of the experiences of carrying out those studies formed the research data along with interviews with key participants to establish the value of the Model. The thesis finds that choice-based models of consulting empower client organisations to evaluate their management development in line with their own objectives and through means of their choosing. This process brings clients to the heart of the consulting exercise and increases their sense of ownership of the results of the organisational evaluation and management development.

CONTENTS

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Introduction

As a lecturer in Public Sector Management at Sheffield Business School (part of Sheffield Hallam University), I began this work as a result of my experiences of evaluating management programmes. As a member of the Corporate and Executive Portoflio I was responsible for the development, management, delivery and assessment of a range of management development programmes with corporate clients in the public sector. It soon became clear that our evaluation of such programmes emphasised the reactions of the individual participants in the course of study and assessed the standard of knowledge they had achieved and their ability to apply that knowledge to their working lives. What we did not evaluate was the impact such programmes had on the client organisations. How did they know that the investment they had made in the programme was worthwhile?

Essentially what we were doing was what commonly happens in organisations. As Dyer (1994) states, the focus is on assessing the impact on the individual rather than on the organisation. The very common use of evaluation sheets immediately post-course and the assessment of knowledge and competence are the normal focus of evaluation in management development as in other fields.

The question of how the impact on the organisation can be assessed came into my mind just at the moment where I was beginning to think about a suitable topic for my Part 2 EdD thesis. This point was half way through Part 1 when I decided that for the second year of Part 1 I would do three assignments on topics of relevance to my thesis requiring me to carry out

reading and thinking which would help prepare me for the larger work. I therefore prepared an assignment on the differences and similarities between evaluation and research (so that I could be really sure which I was doing and why) and a second on learning in organisations and society: the contribution of evaluation. By this means (and through the preparation of the research proposal which constituted the final assignment) I prepared the ground for the completion of the Part 2 thesis.

My motivation for carrying out this work was that my organisation, Sheffield Business School, was heavily involved with corporate programmes and I anticipated that, in time, organisations would want to evaluate the impact of these expensive programmes of study on their organisation. Therefore, an evaluation tool could serve as a valuable product of the School which could in its turn generate income (a demand which was placed on me as part of my role in the team). I was also of the opinion that not to evaluate management programmes like these would mean that clients would fail to appreciate the impact such a management development programme could have on their organisations. I was confident that our programmes were of a high quality, that they stimulated the thinking of the managers who attended and that this did make them better managers.

As my reading progressed I started to wonder whether the issue I was really interested in was that of learning in organisations. As educational research this is, perhaps, a little unconventional as most education research concentrates on learning in formal educational settings such as school. Here I was interested in looking at the learning we continue to do through the course of our working lives and how that individual learning connects with how organisations themselves learn. My experience suggested that this kind of

evaluation needed to happen because learning organisations need to develop their people into critical thinkers and management development is a strong means of doing that.

I therefore started to consider the literature on the measurement of the impact of management development in organisations. Swain (1999) pointed out that typical measures to reflect the value of HR were taken to be, "How many trained? or "How many recruited?". In other words there was measurement of inputs rather than outcomes. Other authors had attempted to assess the 'bottom line' impact of management development in terms of its impact on profits, turnover and market share. It seemed clear to me that it was extremely difficult to distinguish the impact of the management development from that of other factors such as changing markets, improved products or services and economic trends.

My thinking was that in a learning organisation, more relevant measures would ask how the effects of training were reflected in enhanced performance and organisational outcomes and if the type of people hired were capable of enriching the store of intellectual capital and promoting organisational growth and learning. These questions are qualitative and not numerical in nature and illustrate the requirements for processes that continually feed back and update information on client and employee requirements, new ideas and processes and more general analysis and change.

The literature makes very clear that evaluation of this kind needs to be customised to the needs of the organisation (Wills 1993). It therefore occurred to me that what would be useful to clients would be a consultancy tool which would give them options in the evaluation of their management development

programmes. I therefore set out to devise a model which would give the client

a structured series of choices of what exactly they wanted to evaluate (See

Appendix 1). I called this the Yates Options Model for Evaluation (YOME).

This tool provided me with the opportunity to approach potential clients and

offer to assist them in the process of evaluating whether their expenditure on

management development was worthwhile.

As part of that approach to clients I indicated in the covering letter that the

concept of the learning organisation (as expounded by Pedler et al 1997;

Senge 1990 and as analysed and discussed under the banner of

organisational learning by Argyris and Schön 1996) formed part of the model.

This later proved to be the key concept which attracted the clients to work with

me. This is explored more fully in the Findings section (Chapters 4 and 5).

What was developing, therefore, was a piece of action research (AR)

designed to learn about the effectiveness of the consultancy tool by trying it

out with clients and amending and improving it as it progressed. So the model

was being developed through the AR and, in the process, I was learning about

the best way to do evaluation and the best way to do consultancy. Through

the deeply reflective process of carrying out systematic AR I was exploring a

wide range of issues of relevance to myself, my clients and my organisation.

As part of the process of working with the clients we together set up studies

designed to elicit the views of the staff on how they felt that their management

development programmes had impacted upon their organisations and to what

extent they displayed the characteristics of the learning organisation. These

studies, therefore, sat inside the AR and ran alongside them. In a way it was

rather like the classic Russian dolls. The consultancy studies for the two client

organisations sat inside the action research for the thesis. The process of carrying out those studies helped build the relationships with the key participants in the AR process and the one supported the other. As a result, the AR was enhanced and more reflective and deep. However, the consultancy studies were also enriched by the fact that the AR was going on. Indeed the reflective approach which is essential for AR could, arguably, provide vital lessons to the ways in which consultants approach their work.

The Options Model

The consultancy tool which I devised had four phases. The first was termed the 'What' phase where the clients were facilitated to make decisions about what would be investigated. Secondly, I led them to discuss 'How' the studies would be conducted and whose views should be sought. Thirdly, there was a 'Results' phase in which the findings would be interpreted and presented and finally, there was an 'Action' phase which would present the options as to how the organisation might progress from there.

The tool recognises the fact that sometimes achieving lasting improvement comes as a result of factors other than Training & Development. So it deliberately sets out to examine the multitude of factors which go into making successful, creative, learning organisations. It also (and this is essential to the thinking behind it) takes ownership of the evaluation out of the hands of the external evaluator and puts it under the control of the organisation by providing a framework for decision-making which allows choice and flexibility. It is also designed to take into account the views of all key stakeholders and uses triangulation to confirm and illuminate the picture formed. Finally it allows for the learning to be built in to an action plan for change and improvement.

Context for the study

During the period over which I have been studying for the Doctor of Education, my workplace, the business and management schools within Sheffield Hallam University have undergone substantial restructuring on two occasions. On the first, the Postgraduate work was divided from the Undergraduate and placed in a different School – Sheffield Business School. The purpose of this was to develop a responsive, business-orientated, income-generating unit with a corporate and post-graduate agenda. Existing staff were moved into the School and given roles where business development was a key element of their responsibility. My own role was Product Leader in the Corporate and Executive Portfolio and my responsibility was to develop, cost, organise and deliver programmes of bespoke management education with public sector clients. In that capacity I worked on the Kirklees Certificate and Diploma in Management; the Barnsley College Diploma; and the Sheffield City Council Management Development Programme. I also taught on UG programmes in the sister School of Business and Finance (SBF); on PG programmes in SBS; and on a European-funded project to develop a framework for employers on managing diversity.

For the period from 1998 until the summer of 2000 the Business School (in its various guises) had been led by a series of 4 temporary or acting directors. The senior management team in the School were mostly working to their research and personal agendas and the line management of academic staff such as myself was largely non-existent. In July 2000 the Vice-Chancellor appointed a new permanent Director with experience in banking and consultancy who, it was felt, could resolve financial problems which had arisen as a result of the major pressures imposed on the Business School to achieve

its income generation targets without the proper staffing, systems or support to achieve them. In January of 2001, following a report to Governors by the new Director, the V.C. decided on a wholesale restructuring of business and management education in the University which would include an indeterminate number of redundancies and the effective closure of Sheffield Business School. Courses were closed and a new staff structure was drawn up for the SBF to incorporate staff from SBS. All staff in both Schools were required to apply for posts through the use of a selection matrix against a set of generic and poorly-described criteria. Subsequently they were marked out of 300 and allocated posts in the new structure or placed on the redeployment register. Some staff (including myself) were demoted from the Acting Principal Lecturer grades we had been working to in SBS. Others were promoted. Many of those whom some of us felt had failed in their leadership roles in SBS were given senior positions in the new structure.

At the end of July 2001 the new structure, pay and posts came into force and I became a Senior Lecturer in the Public Policy subject group within the International and Languages Business Unit of SBF.

Inevitably this climate of firstly an absence of leadership and later serious upheaval (with very personal consequences for everyone in the organisation) was not conducive to the development of a new product for the School. Nevertheless, I maintained my personal commitment to the work and shared my ideas with respected individuals within the University from whom I received tremendous support.

One by-product of this absence of management was that I was free to develop the research in whatever way I chose. As I did not ask for any resources with

which to complete it I was largely left alone to get on with it. I chose to work with my two clients without charging them the usual Business School rates and my line manager was indifferent to this. As a result I was free to work in the way I thought fit and develop the model, the consultancy and the Action Research in my own way.

I worked with my two clients without asking the usual consultancy fees and, in return, the clients were prepared to accord me reflective interviews for the purposes of the AR. I was fortunate that both clients gave me complete freedom to quote, use names etc. In addition, neither has requested an element of editorial control.

The Research Questions

As the research progressed I started to formulate and, from time to time, to adjust, the research questions. They developed into a coherent set of thinking as a result of the literature review and of my initial research plan. The first research question is 'How can organisations evaluate the impact of management development programmes on their organisation?' This is addressed mainly through the literature review but I also took the opportunity whilst working with the two clients to ask what they had done to evaluate their management development and how they might have assessed this in future had I not approached them to conduct my research.

The second research question is 'What is the impact of the concept of the learning organisation on the process of evaluation?'. Through the inclusion of the learning organisation concept into the Yates Options Model for Evaluation, I was hoping to evaluate how useful it was as a concept in assisting with

evaluation. The breadth and comprehensiveness of the learning organisation model seems to lend itself to an assessment of the state of learning in an organisation and the difference which management development might have made.

The third research question is 'Is YOME an effective means of managing the consultancy process?' As I have designed a consultancy tool it seemed appropriate to use YOME as a means of creating insights into the consultancy process and into choice-based consultancy in particular. In Chapter 5 (the findings discussed with relation to the research questions) I have subdivided this question into two: 'What insights did the exercise give on the consultancy process?' and secondly, 'How did YOME work in the two case study settings?'.

Summary of main findings

As the following chapters will attest, these questions do not have simple answers. Chapter 5 addresses the three research questions with relation to the two client organisations. Chapter 6 draws the themes of the research together and steps back somewhat from the data to widen the discussion and make more generalisable findings.

The main findings of the thesis are that the choice-based model is effective in evaluating management development as long as the consultant possesses the skills required to facilitate those choices. The learning organisation concept was well-received as an important element of the Model and, indeed, acted as a selling point for the exercise in obtaining access. The Model is systematic, well-thought-out and valid and with some amendment to the way it is

presented can be of great value to potential future clients in furthering their organisational aims.

Motivation for the research

It seems to me that my experience of my motivation in carrying out this study can be encapsulated in the following story which I told at a conference on educational innovation (EDINEB Conference, California, June 2000):

Once upon a time there was an idealistic lecturer who worked in a business school where management was taught and who believed passionately in the value of public services. She believed that good management was essential to public services. She also believed that her Business School was one of the least well-managed public sector organisations she had ever come across! She looked to other organisations and saw them spending much money and time on management development. Indeed, some of them came to her Business School to seek help with that activity. Many of those organisations didn't know whether their management development processes were working. Didn't people change for the better and then just leave? How did they know whether the public services they were providing were better for the investment made in management development? In the course of her reading, the idealistic lecturer began to think that the learning organisation model might help people to decide whether their management development was working. Thinking that she might be on to a solution to a conundrum that had bedevilled organisations for a very long time she set about finding a way to develop it. The central idea in her thinking was that it had to be

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the organisation which made the decisions with relation to their evaluation of their organisation and its management development. The power had to be in their hands. This was not going to be another set of mechanisms imposed from on high. This was not going to be another OFSTED, another QAA, another Business Excellence model. This was not going to be another set of right answers. This was going to be a set of QUESTIONS. She designed a consultancy tool which, she thought, put the ball firmly in the court of the client organisation. It set up a series of questions for them to answer. It gave them choices over what they evaluated, how they evaluated it, who got involved in that and what they did with it at the end. It felt good. It felt like an ethical way forward. HOWEVER did she find that the fact that she had structured their choices mean that she had taken away some of their power? Could they reframe destiny when they had first to understand the learning organisation models? Did the learning organisation models lead them down a certain path? Maybe they did. But maybe that was good. That is the CENTRAL issue with this research.

Research Diary entry 11th March 2000

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the early stages of carrying out the literature review for the thesis I identified four sets of literature which would inform and deepen my understanding of the subject of my research. These are the literatures on educational evaluation; the learning organisation concept; consultancy as a professional activity; and action research. From the four areas of literature I formed an understanding of key concepts which I could use to inform the development of the evaluation tool and ensure effectiveness in its implementation.

As my reading progressed I was, to an extent, discovering some overlaps between different areas of the literature. For example, the learning organisations literature sometimes overlaps with the consultancy literature because the former often advocates the learning organisation as a useful approach (Garvin 1993). So if the concept is being explored with organisations it tends to result in a need for consultants to assist in the process. (Senge 1994; Cope 1998 etc)

These overlaps in some senses offer a reassurance that these are the appropriate areas of literature to consider. The fact that I have, as yet, discovered nothing which combines all four areas in one document make me feel that the area where all of these overlap is an original area of work. My research is in that area.

As the reading progressed and the research questions began to form themselves, it became evident these should form the organising principle for the literature review chapter. The four areas outlined above have served a

useful purpose in providing boundaries to the reading, in informing my thinking and in designing the model. So, the literature is presented below under three overall headings which represent the general research questions which were in my mind at the literature review stage.

- How can organisations evaluate the impact of management development programmes on their organisation?
- What is the impact of the concept of the learning organisation on the process of evaluation?
- Is YOME an effective means of managing the consultancy process?

You will see in Chapter 5 (the Findings chapter) that it was important to slightly refine these questions as I could only claim to throw light upon them with relation to the two cases I was working on.

Before moving into the discussion of the literature with relation to the research questions it is important to discuss the research bases on which that literature is, itself, built. Many of the authors quoted below, particularly with relation to the learning organisation and to consultancy approaches have built their theory from many years of experience in carrying out consultancy with organisations of varying natures. Whilst this might be regarded as anecdotal, they are essentially theory-building from very solid grounding in practice. They show deep understanding of the companies with whom they are working and use that to draw conclusions about developments and practice in the field under study. Many draw on previous studies and make new connections. In essence they are creating theory from practice. In discussing the contribution of consultants to the learning organisation Schaffer states

The more consultants learn about these matters, the more powerful their contributions will be. To develop these insights requires working with an organisation for a while, attempting to make progress together, encountering and overcoming barriers, and learning from experience.

If consultants work hard to learn about these issues during each individual project, they will also develop their overall grasp of how to facilitate change in organisations. The rapid-cycle approach, with repeated start-to-finish advances in partnership mode, offers consultants numerous opportunities to develop insights into these vital issues.

Schaffer 1997 p. 120

Burdett (1994), for example (writing on consultancy) learned from his own consultancy experiences in over 30 organisations across ten countries. Tranfield and Smith (1991) produced their guide after twenty years of experience training over 700 consultants and refined their manual in a wide variety of consultancy contexts including manufacturing, public and voluntary services and specialist functions such as systems analysis, operational research, management services, personnel management and organisation development. Similarly Margerison (1988) spent a lot of time giving advice both as an external and internal consultant advisor and his book summarised what he observed and learned on the way. Chandler (1984) set out to present the views and experiences from a wide array of established consultants by

conducting a 17 page questionnaire with 30 consultants and backing this up with a survey of a group of clients.

Where learning has arisen from these kinds of experiences rather than from activities set up explicitly as research it is important to be cautious about findings and to recognise some of the commercial considerations involved. For example, the learning organisation concept has been developed by consultants working with organisations whom they will want to continue to impress. Writing about their experiences they will wish to attract potential future clients and sell the concepts.

As Easterby-Smith et al state:

> Although these accounts are very insightful.... Some may lack the
> critical objectivity of traditional academic work. Authors of this ilk
> usually have an eye to the further consultancy opportunities that will
> flow from a public demonstration of their successes, and hence they
> tend to be economical in their discussion of unsolved problems. This
> 'positive spin' is a feature of some of the most influential accounts of
> learning organisations and it also points to one of the limitations in the
> state of knowledge about organizational learning.

Easterby-Smith et al 1999 p.2

Blake and Mouton (1983) discuss what they call the theory spectrum which is relevant here in placing learning from consultancy on a range of meanings for theory.

Figure 1 The theory spectrum

Nontheoretical basis for action		Subjective or empirical explanations				Theoretical basis for action	
Trial and error	Hunch and intuition	Common-sense explana-tions	Attitudes, beliefs and conven-tional wisdom	Cognitive maps and concep-tual systems	Plans and planning	Theory expressed in the form of explicit hypotheses that can be tested	Principles as express-ions of lawfulness underlying human behaviour

Blake and Mouton (1983 b) p. 283

The literature on consulting and on the learning organisation falls into the category of theories expressed in the form of explicit hypotheses that can be tested. Once the consultant has learned theories and knows how to employ them in concrete situations, he or she no longer has to rely solely on hunch, common sense or his or her own subjective conceptual system. Nevertheless there are authors who are cautious about the overuse of the theory end of the spectrum and recognise the risks of over-intellectualising an experience and thus losing the feeling component of the insight.

Something that has to do with the denial of the reality of feeling on the irrational ground is not rational. A lot of 'objective' research published in the field of applied behavioural science has the quality of talking valid experience to death. The notion that reason and emotions are mutually exclusive pervades our society. I want reason and emotion unified in my own behaviour and experience.

Kingsbury (1972) p.107

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This work recognises the issues in using work which has not been set up as systematic research but also seeks to learn from the experiences of those consultants. This reflects the discussion on so-called 'communities of practice' which forms part of the organisational learning literature. Here learning is viewed as an inevitable part of participating in social life and practice. In addition to individual cognitive learning it involves membership of a community and improving the skills of its members (Elkjaer 1999). In carrying out a systematic piece of action research I hope to take the debate forward and contribute the product of my learning to the discussion on issues in consulting and evaluation.

I will now go on to discuss the literature with relation to the key research questions.

Question 1 - How can organisations evaluate the impact of management development programmes on their organisation?

To begin with, let us define some terms. Management development is the sum of the efforts made by organisations to develop the management capacities of their staff. These efforts normally include training programmes, sometimes with qualifications attached, sometimes not. They might also include shadowing, mentoring, coaching, creating opportunities for development through new areas of work and secondment. Appraisal, performance management and employee development planning are all part of the complete picture of management development.

Most organisations now invest heavily in management development. 12,000 students enrolled on validated Masters in Business Administration (MBA)

courses at UK universities or colleges in 2000 alone (Association of MBA web site www.mba.org.uk visited 14/7/01). Only 4% of large companies and 20% of small companies offer no management training at all and most perceive that formal management training will increase in the foreseeable future to a point where 47% of managers will be receiving 6 or more days per year of formal training (Open University 1997). Thus, organisations are investing heavily in management training and development and presumably believe that such an investment will pay off in terms of improved performance, retention of staff and greater organisational effectiveness.

> In business terms, expenditure on training and development is an investment in human resources. ....Far from training being a luxury unrelated to the business needs of an organisation, it is integral to business success. If it is able to contribute to business objectives, then it is capable of yielding a return for the organisation.
>
> Jackson 1989 Preface

This research assumes that organisations which have invested heavily in management development will be interested in knowing whether or not their investment is worthwhile in terms of impact on the individual participants; their skills and behaviours; and on the organisation itself and its success. (Goldstein 1986, Wills 1993)

> There is a whole number of reasons why trainers should not evaluate their efforts, but only if training and development is seen as a separate issue and unrelated to the business which organisations are in. If the training and development is seen as integral to the organisation's

business, then evaluation ceases to be an issue and becomes a fact of life.

Jackson 1989 p.1

Evaluation in the context of learning and training can be defined as follows:

The systematic collection of descriptive and judgmental information necessary to make effective decisions related to the selection, adoption, value and modification of various instructional activities.

Goldstein 1986 p. 80

Evaluation is a sub-category of research which has somewhat different purposes, accountability, timescales, ethics and outputs. Definitions of evaluation stress that it is attempting to make value judgements. For example

Like those who seek to understand, the evaluators are also trying to describe, interpret or explain what is happening, but in doing so they are setting out to make value judgements, or to portray events so that others may make value judgements, about the worthwhileness of the topic. The expected endpoint is that someone will use their findings to decide whether or not to try to induce change.

Bassey 1995 p. 6

It is important not to simply assume that the evaluation of management development is a worthwhile activity but to look more closely at why organisations and management developers want to do this. There are many motivations for evaluation. To some extent evaluation is attractive in order to have one's pride in the learning programme justified and one's curiosity as to

participants' views satisfied. Thus, the evaluation is carried out and its outcome, if positive, used to further the interests of those involved. The evaluation helps establish the credibility of the training and development managers involved and may enhance the organisation's willingness to invest resources. (Campbell 1994).

As the evaluation process continues and becomes routine there is a risk that it becomes mechanistic and somewhat meaningless. As Easterby-Smith writes

> Much of the current evaluation practice is widely recognised as serving little more than a ritual function.
>
> Easterby-Smith 1985 p.2

Nevertheless, there is often a keen interest in discovering whether training works and why it works. (Mmobuosi 1985) Banfield writes,

> Whilst estimates of the total amount spent on training varies, recent estimates put the figure at some £25 billion in 1996, and growing. There is evidence supporting the view that employer commitment to training and development is more positive than before. Clearly, this level of investment without appropriate efforts to evaluate its effects is an untenable situation, and there is evidence that companies are now taking much more seriously the importance of undertaking effective evaluation.
>
> in Megginson, Banfield and Joy-Matthews 1999 p.163

Often, evaluation is carried out with a view to justifying approaches to a wider audience, a government body or a funding agency. Here it may be uninvited, external and compulsory. It may feel arbitrary and imposed. Inglis relates this to a seeming need for legitimation in society and a general breakdown of trust.

Audit itself has become an invocation of ultimate and mysterious authority going far beyond any narrow financial interpretation. It encompasses the grisly rise of quality assurance reviews which have long since obliterated the reasonable hope that seniors may be reviewed by their peers, and juniors by seniors and both by an equality of representation, in order to determine that duties are being done and rights being regarded.

Inglis 1998 p.12

Organisations may also carry out evaluation simply in order to build in improvements to ongoing programmes. Indeed in an ideal world this might be the only purpose of evaluation.

I am dubious about the contribution evaluation can make to the debates at either the national or the company level, if it is seen in terms of *proving*. Many of the policy issues with respect to management training are both political and value-laden and it is unlikely that evaluation studies would be of sufficient scale or sufficiently targeted to provide a definitive contribution to such debates. Rather, it seems that the best role for evaluation to play in these cases is one of *improving* the quality of the debate through concentrating on, and illuminating, the key issues instead of trying to take the policy decisions out of the arena of political debate.

Easterby-Smith 1994 p.173

A number of authors comment that evaluation can be completed at a number of levels. The most common way it is done is through the immediate reactions of participants to the training (Brown, 1980; Rosti and Shipper 1998). This assumes that if participants like the training it must be effective. This is, of course a big and possibly unfounded assumption (McClelland 1994). At times, learning can be an uncomfortable experience, challenging all one's safe assumptions about the world and making demands on our time and intelligence. This may cause participants to be over-critical, to find fault and become defensive. Sometimes it is difficult to see beyond the discomfort to the future gain.

Therefore, authors attempt to introduce ways of measuring the impact of the training more systematically through a variety of means (Rosti and Shipper 1998; Parlett and Hamilton 1977; Wrennal 1998). Attempts are made to incorporate the evaluation of training into other activities such as appraisal and workload planning. This reveals more than ever that a number of levels can be designed. Perhaps the most oft-quoted author describing these levels is Kirkpatrick (1975). His work is widely quoted in the training journals (Campbell 1994; Bramley and Kitson 1994). He defined four levels for evaluation. These were, firstly, Reaction (measurement of trainees reactions to the program); secondly, Learning (measurement of learning gains and the facts, techniques, skills or attitudes gained); thirdly, Behaviour (measurement of changes in the trainees' behaviour and use of their new-found skills); and Results (the organisation's return on the training investment). (Kirkpatrick 1975)

Recognising that there are different levels which can be evaluated serves only to raise awareness; it does nothing to resolve the difficulties which assessing the impact on the organisation as a whole presents. This total impact is, naturally, the primary interest of the organisation which has made the investment.

As we rise through the levels identified by Kirkpatrick, cost and complexity increase. As a result, most evaluation is at the Reaction level using individual post-course questionnaires to establish personal views of the course or activity. (Campbell 1994; Bramley and Kitson 1994) Organisations often allow post-course 'happiness sheets' to suffice. (Smith 1993)

> The logic of this approach is that, as organisations are made up of individuals, it must be possible to change the organization by changing the members. This is, however, a great simplification of organisational reality. An organization will have objectives, priorities and policies. It will also have a structure and an accepted way of doing things. All of these situational factors will have some effect on shaping the behaviour of members of the organisation within their work. Often the 'changed' individual is not able to change these situational factors."
>
> Bramley 1991 p. 4

Of all the levels of organisational evaluation which Kirkpatrick defines, the impact on the organisational level is the least-often evaluated. It is the most difficult because of:

- Lack of reliable cost figures
- Difficulty in identifying, monitoring and quantifying training benefits;

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- Subjective and questionable nature of the assumptions to be made

- Inability to isolate training's influence on performance improvements from other factors;

- Time and effort involved in calculating the costs and documenting the benefits of training; and

- Potential for unfavourable returns on the investment. (Campbell 1994)

The focus has generally been (at best) on the first three of Kirkpatrick's levels at the expense of the last (Dyer 1994). The concept of assessing results for the organisation has been widely accepted but on the whole it has not been implemented (Plant and Ryan 1994).

Separating the impact of the programme from other factors in organisational success is virtually impossible. Is the company more successful because of the programme or because a major competitor has closed? Has there been a favourable change in lifestyles or are seasonal patterns developing? Maybe manager performance is improving but that might be because they are simply becoming more experienced; have a new boss; or human resource management in general is improving. There could be many reasons why organisational performance has changed. Even Kirkpatrick himself recognised that evaluation provides evidence not proof of benefit (Plant and Ryan 1994 p.1).

In the case of management education it is, arguably, even more difficult to know whether training is effective than in the case of more practical and immediate skills such as that for IT or manual tasks. With routine clerical or data inputting it is possible to run checks on speed and accuracy before and

after the training and see what changes have occurred. However, management requires a much more diffuse and complex set of skills which are more difficult to test in a workplace situation. Assessment through assignments for a course may show that a course participant understands concepts and can discuss their application. This would be in line with Kirkpatrick's Learning level. However, this cannot show that their behaviour has changed. Even if the views of co-workers are sought in an attempt to assess behaviour change, their view will be coloured by their own experiences and by personal relationships.

So if organisations are going to take part in the evaluation of management development they need to find methods to do it in the best way possible. Campbell (1995) proposes a number of approaches based on determining cost-effectiveness – return on investment, cost-benefit ratio, bottom line evaluation and payback period. Murphy (1992) proposes a cyclical process of self-reflection entitled SEER (Self-evaluation and Effectiveness Review) in which members of an organisation try to define criteria of ineffectiveness as a platform on which to build improvements to theory and practice at a personal, group or organisational level.

Smith and Piper (1990) make a comprehensive review of the literature on evaluation in their monograph providing a practitioner's guide to evaluation. As they point out, organisations adopt a range of approaches sometimes scientific, adopting positivistic, quantitative data collection methods or sometimes more humanistic approaches drawing on more qualitative or phenomenological techniques.

The overriding requirement is for evaluation to be devised appropriately for the organisation's needs. Standardised approaches will produce standardised answers whereas methods which take into account the needs of the organisation, the design of the management development programme and evaluate on the basis of objectives will obtain a much more valuable outcome. (Wills 1993)

Evidence from research in Local Government (Dawson 1995) suggests that a five-way typology of trainers can be perceived:

1. Uneasy Ritualists who were expending no thought on evaluation, beyond checking that new courses were running as smoothly as expected, and were using evaluation mechanisms known to be unreliable as a basic, if fallible, insurance against criticism, or as a professional imperative to do at least some evaluation.

2. Incrementalists who make small changes in their approach to evaluation, adapting and extending where it will fit into the usual practices and organisational norms without too much disruption.

3. Innovators who are creative and reflective and may be prepared to take risks to institute more fundamental changes.

4. Pilot Strategists who are politically aware and can see the implications of impending organisational changes which affect the view of training and its very viability. They see evaluation as a means of trouble-shooting and a way of demonstrating effectiveness, so that external critics could not easily claim their efforts were mere acts of faith.

5. Policy Achievers (whom he expected to find in Local Government but did not) would be responsible directly to the policy makers in the organisation and work closely with them to ensure that development targets are

feasible, appropriate to the organisational culture, and in line with organisational objectives. They would evaluate continuously not just in terms of perceived views of final outcomes but in terms of process as well. Thus they would operate at all stages of organisational learning.

Perhaps my model requires a Policy Achiever approach to be in place or, at least, for the door to be open towards the establishment of such an approach. If Local Government is typical (which we may doubt) then it may be that the model will founder because those involved with the evaluation of training (and with whom I am most likely to work) are not Policy Achievers but at worst Uneasy Rutualists and at best Incrementalists. Perhaps this implies a need to obtain the commitment of those working in more of a Policy Achiever frame of mind – in other words to obtain the commitment of key senior personnel who can champion the idea in the organisation and ensure that it achieves real change.

In a sense what the literature is leading to is a recognition that for evaluation to be effective it must be integrated with the rest of the functioning of the organisation and must take account of the culture of the organisation (Lewis and Thornhill 1994). Perhaps by taking the learning organisation as an integrating concept, I can facilitate that interlinking of evaluation with the purpose, culture and functioning of the organisation which seems so important yet elusive. This is the subject of the next research question.

Research Question 2 – What is the impact of the concept of the learning organisation on the process of evaluation?

There are three strands of literature of relevance here. There is that which stresses that the learning organisation is an objective to be achieved. It is populist and advocates approaches and techniques which organisations can use to achieve the goal of becoming a learning organisation and by that means achieve sustainable competitive advantage. (Senge 1990 and 1994; Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell 1997; Cope 1998).

The second strand is that which looks at organisational learning as a set of more complex phenomena in which personal and human interactions are dependent on psychological and social factors and which attempts to explain rather than proselytise (Argyris and Schön 1996; Schein 1998; Klimecki and Lassleben 1998). Drawing on these schools of thought and on the thinking behind the development of sophisticated computer technology is the thinking on Knowledge Management. This emphasises the acquisition of knowledge and its sharing round the organisation through the use of technology. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Nonaka 1996; Allee 1997). Nonaka carried out studies of Japanese companies in the 1970s and 80s looking at the speed and flexibility with which they developed new products. He went on to do research on knowledge creation as a vital source of international competitiveness. He treated the Japanese companies as representative case studies rather than success stories in order to avoid charges of over-selling their success.

These concepts are closely integrated and draw on one another. For the purposes of designing my research tool, the learning organisation models are immediately attractive as they offer an easily-grasped objective to the client.

For that reason I need to give them extensive treatment here. However, the organisational learning concepts feed well into both the second and third research questions.

A useful definition of a learning organisation is as follows:

> A learning organisation harnesses the full brain power, knowledge and experience available to it, in order to evolve continually for the benefit of all its stakeholders.
>
> Mayo and Lank, 1994 p.3

Garvin (1993), basing his knowledge on research with major international companies such as Xerox, EG and IBM, suggests that learning organisations are skilled at five main activities: systematic problem solving; experimentation with new approaches; learning from their own experience and past history; learning from the experiences and best practices of others; and transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organisation.

Similarly, Senge identifies five key characteristics which everyone must develop in order to create a learning organisation:

1. Systems Thinking – Everyone learning that one action or set of events has an impact on how others think and act
2. Personal Mastery – The discipline of continually clarifying and deepening personal vision – developing patience, seeing reality objectively
3. Mental Models – Unearthing mental pictures of the world and holding them to vigorous scrutiny

4. Building a Shared Vision – Leadership being used to create organisations, structures and activities.

5. Team Learning. Teams, not individuals being key to successful organisations of the future and the only way in which organisations can learn.

Senge 1990

Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell, (1997 p. 15) building on extensive consultancy with public and private sector organisations which were aiming to develop as learning organisations, explain that in their view a learning company has 11 characteristics:

1. A Learning Approach to Strategy

2. Participative Policy Making

3. Informating – using IT to make information widely available to front-line staff in order to empower them to act on their own initiative

4. Formative Accounting and Control

5. Internal Exchange

6. Reward Flexibility

7. Enabling Structures

8. Boundary Workers as Environmental Scanners

9. Inter-company Learning

10. A Heaving Climate where change is welcome and normal

11. Self-Development Opportunities for All

Potentially evaluation can contribute directly to the creation of 1,2,5,9,10 and 11 and indirectly to the creation of the others. Evaluation discussions provide a shared context where individuals can interact with each other and engage in

discussion. They pool information and examine it from various angles and go on to integrate individual perspectives into new collective perspectives.

Thurbin defines a learning organisation as follows:

> a learning organisation is one which improves its knowledge and understanding of itself and its environment over time, by facilitating and making use of the learning of its individual members.

Thurbin 1994 p.7

He describes the learning organisations in terms of

- Transformation
- Change
- Participation
- Innovation
- Altering the way people work
- Adapting
- Management style
- Delegation
- Fostering employee involvement

Nonaka (1996) argues that the key to unlocking the knowledge in the memory of individuals in the organisation is to create a sense of identity between the employee and the organisation and to tap in to the commitment generated. Evaluating the effectiveness of programmes may help with that process of building trust in what is happening. If stakeholders participate in evaluative

thinking and can see a purpose for that they will partake in the sharing of knowledge which is so central to the building of a learning organisation.

Echoing this, Nonaka states:

....creating new knowledge is not simply a matter of 'processing' objective information. Rather it depends on tapping the tacit and often highly subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches of individual employees and making those insights available for testing and use by the company as a whole. The key to the process is personal commitment, the employees' sense of identity with the enterprise and its mission.

Nonaka 1996 p.19

If evaluation is handled well and involves the expression of those 'tacit and subjective insights' it can contribute to the sharing of knowledge and contribute to competitive advantage. By asking participants in a programme what they have learned, how it is useful, how it can be shared they have another opportunity to develop their sense of identity with the organisation. They have another chance to be involved with the changing nature of the business and the direction it will take. A well-handled management development programme should be doing that in itself but the evaluation is another contributor to effective organisational learning. Both can contribute to continuous personal and organisational renewal. Nonaka's view is that it is when tacit knowledge (which is highly personal and deeply rooted in someone's own personal context and experience) becomes explicit knowledge because it has been verbalised or shown to another and shared that "something powerful happens". So when, during the course of an evaluation

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participants say 'In my experience ....' they are sharing tacit knowledge and making it explicit.

Nonaka finds that figurative language and symbolism are very powerful in the articulation of this tacit knowledge. Many Western managers deride such slogans but in highly innovative Japanese companies they are used to great effect. Evaluation, which encourages the formulation of metaphors and analogies, may well contribute to organisational learning. Similarly, an evaluation discussion may be just the creative environment needed for someone to articulate a new vision of what the organisation is all about – a place where what Nonaka calls 'conceptual umbrella' terms are articulated and reinforced. Thus, an evaluation discussion recently led a participant to say that what their organisation (a local authority) was about was 'caring control'. The phrase was appreciated and refined during and following the discussion.

De Geus (1996) emphasises the importance of play in this learning process. He surveyed 30 companies which had been in business for more than 75 years and recalls how Shell encouraged managers to imagine scenarios which seemed unlikely at the time (such as a $15 dollar per barrel oil price at the time of $28 actual prices) thus preparing them for the time when that low price was hit. The opportunity also exists to build scenarios in to evaluative discussions. Where organisations either conduct their own evaluations or are involved with consultants in the design of the evaluation, those scenarios can be tailor-made to ensure that management education in the organisation is geared to effective planning even for the unexpected.

These are just some of the many tools which can be developed to foster a climate of critical self-awareness in the learning manager. Following her

longitudinal study of financial services managers Antonacopoulou describes a number of characteristics of the learning manager: they are resourceful, self-directed, inquisitive and creative in their learning approach; they are emotionally competent; they are less concerned with organisational politics and impression management than some; they see unlearning as a function of knowing who they are and what they are capable of becoming; they are honest with themselves and others; they exercise critical self-reflection; and they recognise factors which underpin their positive and negative attitudes to learning (Antonacopoulou 1999). She identifies that individual managers may be both mathophobic (reluctant to learn and having a negative attitude to an identified learning need) and philomathic (ready to learn and to explore diverse learning opportunities) at the same time in different contexts. Collaborative approaches to evaluation may certainly foster a philomathic approach by engendering a culture where critical reflection and openness to new ideas are norms for the organisation so that the individual who is constantly mathophobic begins to feel out of place to the point where change or departure are the only choices.

Organisational learning theories (as mentioned in the introduction to this section) consider the psychology of organisations and how they operate. Nevis, DiBella and Gould (1999) focus on how you can tell if your company is a learning organisation. They advocate a focus on learning as a systems-level phenomenon because it stays with the organization, even if the individuals change. They arrive at a three-stage model:

1. Knowledge acquisition – The development or creation of skills, insights, relationships.

2. Knowledge sharing – The dissemination of what has been learned

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3. Knowledge utilization – The integration of learning so it is broadly available and can be generalized to new situations.

Huber (1991) refers to the assimilation and utilisation process as "organisational memory".

Up until now this section of the literature review has concentrated on how useful the learning organisation concept is in evaluation. However, for it to be useful it has, in itself to be a respected and useful concept. For this reason I will now go on to consider critiques of the learning organisation model itself.

Chapter 7 of Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (1998) takes a close look at the Learning School as one school of strategy. A number of other models are considered. Mintzberg et al feel that what they call 'the learning school'

> offers a counterbalancing force to the "rational" deliberateness that has for so long dominated the literature and practice of strategic management. Our support, however, is not unqualified. There is always the danger of going to the opposite extreme. "Learning", after all, is currently in vogue. Yet it can lead to the very disintegration of strategy.

> Mintzberg et al 1998 p. 223

They say that firstly, there is a risk of *no strategy* ("a hodgepodge of technologies and systems that collectively end up as less than the sum of their parts" p. 225). There are conditions under which patient learning cannot be relied upon, crisis being the most obvious. "An organisation can have loads of

venturing and thousands of flowers blooming all over the place, yet have no coherence at all – no strategy" p. 225.

Secondly there is the risk of *lost strategy* . Where there is an over-emphasis on learning people can start championing initiatives because they are new or more interesting and they drift away from a perfectly viable strategy. "Effective management means to sustain learning while pushing strategies that work.... The tricky part concerns learning at the edges of that strategic umbrella: when to cut off initiatives that venture beyond the umbrella as opposed to when to enlarge the umbrella to recognise their benefits." (p. 227)

Thirdly there is *Wrong Strategy*, "Learning in an incremental way can result in the emergence of strategies that no-one ever wanted, let alone intended. The organization is lured, one step at a time into an undesirable position." p. 228

> The learning organization is all the rage right now, and mostly for good reason. But it is no panacea for anything. People have to learn, but they also have to get on with doing the regular work efficiently. (Horses wear blinders for good reason.) There can be a time to learn and a time to exploit previous learning. Moreover, ... there can be superstitious learning too, and "groupthink", which means learning into a collective corner, if you like. ...So learning is wonderful, but there can be too much of any wonderful thing!

> Finally, learning can be expensive. It takes time, sometimes results in endless meetings and floods of electronic mail; it goes off in all sorts of funny directions; resources must be invested in false starts; people have to be convinced of the benefits of one initiative over another; and

the organization may be forced to bound around repeatedly, and so

pay the price of not settling down quickly enough to concentrate its

resources. Managers have to focus their learning; they need to know

"learning about what?" A real learning organisation is

also worried about unnecessary learning.

<div align="right">Mintzberg et al 1998 p. 229</div>

Brown scorns the learning organisation concept as follows:

Unfortunately, in common with many other concepts and models that

emerge from the management disciplines, the literature on the learning

organisation suffers from a surfeit of prescription, definitional argument

and model building, backed by a relatively small and tenuous body of

analysis of the concept as it exists within real life organisations.

<div align="right">Brown 1998 p. 63</div>

Megginson, Banfield and Joy-Matthews discuss the

Possible drawbacks to the learning company focus [which] include:

- It is somewhat hard to grasp and does not have the immediate impact of other leading ideas;

- It requires a wide focus, which is not the concern of many people in organisations, who can best be launched on the learning route by addressing immediate needs in their workplace;

- It focuses upon learning rather than the more pressing and engaging concerns of managers.

Megginson et al 1999 p. 20

So the learning organisation model is not universally admired and should be treated with caution for that reason. Nevertheless, it has some attractions as an organising concept for evaluation. The very focus on learning is in keeping with management development as a concept. The literature is often systematic, clear and unequivocal which makes its incorporation into a consultancy tool relatively straightforward. As a result, the client can quickly grasp the approach being adopted and start the review process quickly.

We should consider the cyclical nature of these arguments. If organisations develop best by their members' learning then developing a cyclical self-review process will aid that learning and ultimately increase effectiveness. Thus not only is the proposed approach of the research reported in this thesis likely to assess the extent to which an organisation is a learning one, but also, the process of conducting the evaluation will contribute to its learning. As Murphy states

> The great teachers in life are experience coupled with critical self-reflection based on abstract conceptualizations. But, unless these are married into a process, learning, and therefore change and improvement, is likely to be piecemeal and incremental.

Murphy 1992 p. 30

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Putting this whole literature into perspective, perhaps what is important is that organisations need to know how they are progressing towards a desired state – that of being a learning organisation. Smith and Tosey (1999) propose that developing the concept of the learning organisation cannot go on without finding a way to measure progress towards that objective. The Options Model may or may not assist in that process. What it certainly must do is enable organisations to think about their progress towards that goal. Whether it can be measured is doubtful. My thinking is that the Options Model will help organisations reframe their understanding and consider ways forward rather than put actual or numerical values on their progress towards that goal. What must be avoided is the temptation to become like those who award gongs and prizes for the accumulation of evidence of valid approaches. It is the stimulation of thinking and the action which results that matters more than the ticks in the assessor's boxes. As Smith and Tosey (1999) suggest

accuracy should not be the highest priority for a representation of a phenomenon; what matters .... is that a representation or map should galvanise effort and provide a means to monitor progress, so that managers steer through an "action research" process rather than waiting for some authoritative guide.

Smith and Tosey (1999) p. 4

Similarly, Preskill and Torres (as a result of the experience of carrying out evaluations in government, business, health care and education organisations) argue that

evaluation as currently practised is more likely to be conceived and implemented as a product-orientated event, rather than as an integral,

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on-going process that contributes to individual, team and organizational learning. And, as continuous change becomes the normal state in organizations, evaluators will need to broaden their purpose and corresponding set of tools if they wish their work to contribute significantly to the future success of organzations.

Preskill and Torres 1999 p. 92

This links well with the third and final research question.

Research Question 3 - Is YOME an effective means of managing the consultancy process?

The third question goes to the heart of the underlying philosophy of this piece of research in that it asks whether anyone other than the organisation itself can judge the worth of its management development programme. This presents me with a number of issues as a researcher which will be addressed in the research methodology section, particularly, how overlaps between an academic research and a commercial consulting role can be managed. For the moment, however, I will concentrate on the more theoretical issue of whether organisations should evaluate management development for themselves rather than have others do it for or to them.

There are several aspects to this. Firstly, although I set out to facilitate discussions and choices, will organisations want an authoritative answer to their questions: a knowledgeable expert who can come in and make a judgement on the basis of experience of other management development

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programmes? Will they want life to be easy and have someone else do the work for them? It seems to me that only trying out my model will answer that and that if 'yes' is the answer then the model will fail. Some of the literature on consultancy discussed below may assist in designing that process and help to ensure success. The model may be amended to be more prescriptive or simpler but the essential philosophy underlying it cannot be changed.

The second aspect is how the process of working with a client to help them make their choices should be managed. Here the consultancy literature is again helpful and much of what follows focuses on these points of practice. The literature on consultancy is very practically-oriented and helps to shape approaches which are manageable and effective. Many of the authors quoted have built these models and approaches from experiences of consultancy in companies and from teaching consultancy in education and training contexts (Chandler 1984; Schaffer 1997; Block 1981; Markham 1998).

The third aspect is the wider context of these issues. Many organisations, particularly in the public sector are required to make assessments of effectiveness, to evaluate their approaches in order to pass some kind of test or obtain some award. For example, schools are subject to OFSTED inspection, universities to Subject Review and hospitals to the achievement of externally determined targets. Companies prepare themselves for the Investors in People Award and Business Excellence Awards in an attempt not only to improve their effectiveness but to obtain recognition and use their achievement to further their commercial or other interests. Ozga (2000) decries this trend as the imposition of externally determined standards which undermines creativity in organisations and the professionals responsible within those organisations. What this model should, therefore, do is to ensure that

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the evaluative process is much more about framing or reframing understanding than conforming with imposed standards and approaches.

Most of the literature on consultancy emphasises the importance of clarity about the client's needs (Burdett 1994; Margerison 1988, Miller 1997). In achieving this authors advocate asking questions and proposing options.

> It is difficult to imagine how quality consulting can result where the underlying client's needs are not defined effectively. Asking quality questions is focal to the art of management....Consultants would be well advised to hone their questioning skills not in a random fashion but around a defined – albeit flexible – format. An established format allows preparation, analysis and reflection to be part of the question development process: all essential aspects of ongoing learning.
>
> Burdett 1994 p. 36

Wrennal (1998) advocates an options approach to evaluation:

> The development of sound options has several advantages. It affords a choice rather than a rejection, allows management to perform its function of decision making, releases further information that was not previously available, limits the introduction of unreasonable options and facilitates creative participation leading to an acceptable hybrid.
>
> Wrennal 1998 p.1

Miller (1997) connects systems theory and psychoanalysis to bring together the what and the how of organisational consultancy.

What has emerged is commonly an ongoing collaboration in which the consultant and client work together in gaining a deeper understanding of the system and generating possible courses of action. The decision to act (or not) rests with the client; both jointly review the outcomes and, if appropriate, move to a next phase.

Miller 1997 p. 191

The consultancy literature outlines a number of ways in which the consultant can operate which are more or less collaborative and more or less prescriptive. Margerison (1988) discusses four consulting models:

1. The doctor – problem requiring outside expertise. Diagnosis needed followed by treatment or removal of the offending part

2. The detective – clues used to find fault and lay blame, punishment and reform laid down

3. The salesperson - consultant has a solution and is in search of problems. Bag of tricks to help. Solution needs to be adaptable to context though.

4. The travel agent. Consultant assumes client is on a journey and they might not know where they are going or how to get there. Consultant is there to help them decide where they want to go and how to get there. Consultant designs vehicles for them to go in e.g. project groups, workshops, task forces, workshops, meetings etc and maps for them to use. So we get DVM – Destinations, Vehicles, Maps.

The Options Model for Evaluation takes the fourth approach as its underlying philosophy although one could say that there is a 'bag of tricks' as in the salesperson model but the key is that the tricks are there to help reframe understanding not to provide as answers to problems.

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So, the literature suggests that consultants need certain skills in order to be effective in what they are trying to achieve. They must keep a balance between demonstrating that they are needed and allowing the organisation to make its own decisions. There are three major tasks: getting in to the organisation, doing the work and getting out (the latter being important in order to put an clear end to work and the commercial relationship) but that does not preclude the possibility of return (for a further fee!). To be effective in this consultants must demonstrate that they are skilled in understanding the complexity of the organisation and the situations it is facing and being creative about furthering the work and managing the processes. (Tranfield and Smith 1991)

Similarly Burdett (1994) argues that

> At least 50% of the overall skill-set of those who thrive in a consulting environment rests with their ability to do four things well: establish rapport, use questions to define client's needs, demonstrate an ability to deliver and, obtain commitment to start. Put simply the best are technically superb and know how to sell.
>
> Burdett 1994 p. 35

Margerison elaborates this into a 12 step process subsumed under three stages. The first stage is Appraisal, where the consultant contacts the organisation, prepares for the work and negotiates contracts. The second stage is termed Assessment and consists of data collection, analysis and diagnosis, feedback and discussion. The final stage – Application consists of making proposals, the organisation making decisions, the decisions being implemented and finally a review. Applying this to my own model, one could

say that the 'What' phase focuses on the Appraisal stage, the 'How' and 'Results' phases address the Assessment stage and the 'Action' phase relates well to the Application phase.

Margerison also includes very useful discussion about costing the work which (if and when the Options model becomes a product of the Business School) will be very useful but at this stage is merely of passing interest. What is more valuable for present purposes is his treatment of the politics of consulting. He advises that it may be necessary to set up a steering group in the organisation to work with you. This helps build action and energy in the organisation towards achieving agreed goals. This accords with the work on Local Government quoted above which has led me to think that interacting with the right people is vital from the start. It is important to involve all the key stakeholders in the process so that wide organisational commitment is obtained at an early stage. (Margerison 1988 p.153)

This is echoed by Schneider (1997) whose summary of advice to consultants sums up well the complexity of dealing with organisational politics. I have included it in full as it seems to address a number of the issues likely to be faced in applying the Options Model:

- Taking the system focus, not a component focus, allows for a much more meaningful intervention.
- Identifying and building on an organisation's strengths is an important and constant emphasis to take.
- Any intervention must be customised to the client's unique nature and business.

- Honouring the uniqueness of each client is very important. This is half science and half art. Each client is its own, unique mosaic.

- The approach must continually address the *framework(s)* being applied; it must be *systematic* (i.e. planned and stepped out); and it must emphasise a *collaborative process* that treats the client as a true partner.

- *Strategy* is the decider – meaning all roads of difference lead back to the organisation's strategy. What it takes for the organisation to gain distinctive competitive advantage in its market place is the guidepost for the resolution of all differences.

- The relationship between strategy, culture and leadership is multiplicative, not linear. All three must be kept in mind, all the time. This is a spiral process, not a linear process.

- All organisations have *core or lead* cultures and sub- or subsidiary cultures. The key is that the sub-cultures must function in service to the core or lead culture.

- All systems have four primary characteristics. These characteristics must be kept in mind, all the time, and worked with one another in the 'right' spiral manner. These four primary characteristics are: maintain, relate, renew and transcend.

- Applying the *principles* of the other three cultures to the core or lead culture helps an organisation develop more completeness. Applying the *principle* of the opposite culture helps an organisation develop more balance.

- It is very important to honour the readiness and stage of development of the client organisation. We must build from where the client is in its own development.

- The intended acts on the innate. What people want and desire affects their objectivity when asked to look at how things actually are within their organisation. It is important to continually keep this in mind.

<div align="right">Schneider 1997 p. 264</div>

The first five and the penultimate one are particularly relevant to any organisation consultancy.

Finally, to Preskill and Torres (1999) who make some very relevant connections between two of my areas of literature review. Their research on evaluation communication and reporting strategies with evaluation practitioners revealed the close linkages between evaluative enquiry and the creation and evolution of the learning organisation. They found that over three quarters of their respondents suggested that evaluators should take responsibility for facilitating organisational learning. This was a departure from the original purpose of evaluation which was to collect the necessary information to make informed judgements and decisions. Here the role is much wider and recognises the value of evaluative enquiry in fostering and sharing learning.

Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to distil reading in four areas into the three research questions which form the focus of the research. The overlaps between the areas are evident but interesting. There is a solid foundation of theoretical material combined with advice built on consultancy practice and research which forms a good springboard for the implementation stage of my

own research. Issues remaining at this stage are centred around the model

itself and how it will aid in answering the research questions. It is to that which

I now turn. More discussion of literature will be included there, particularly

with relation to action research which forms the basis of the methodology to be

adopted.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The action research into the value of the Yates Options Model for Evaluation effectively began in September 1999 when the consultancy model was put together. This followed a literature review and a brainstorming seminar at Sheffield Business School. During the next two months an abortive attempt was made to obtain access to City of York Council with a view to trying out the model there. When this collapsed, alternatives had to be sought. In February of 2000, I approached Barnsley School Effectiveness Team (BSET) to discuss the possibility of working with them to test out the model and they agreed. In March, ACE Conveyor Equipment agreed to take part and the research process began in earnest. Between February and October 2000, a series of meetings, research activities and reporting back procedures on the state of learning in the organisations took place. In addition, the key players at the organisations were asked to review the process as we progressed. These reviews formed an integral part of the data collection phase of the action research. This reviewing process was completed in November 2000. (See schedule of interactions in Appendix 2)

So the consultancy processes with the two clients were embedded within action research methodology designed to test the effectiveness of the model. The whole exercise lasted a full year and can be characterised by the phrase consultancy within research. In a sense three projects took place – a consultancy project for each of the two clients subsumed within a larger action research project for the purposes of the Ed.D. research. The differences are clear – the consultancy projects were designed to achieve the objectives of the organisations and needed to demonstrate immediate value to those involved. The action research was longer term, deeper and more analytical

and it is that which constitutes the focus of the thesis. There inevitably needs to be discussion of the projects carried out for the clients but this is primarily to provide context for the discussion of the action research into the value of the model.

The phases of the consultancy stage varied between the two organisations as (in keeping with the spirit of the model) the two clients had choice in how they progressed the work. The common elements were firstly, an initial meeting with my main contact to introduce the model and obtain agreement to proceed; secondly, a meeting with a wider number of managers in the organisation to spread ownership of the project and discuss the 'what' and 'how' choices; thirdly a data-gathering phase and; fourthly an action phase in which there was discussion of where to proceed next. The distinctiveness of these phases gave the opportunity for reflection as we progressed and the transition points between them effectively became the points at which review (in terms of the action research) could take place.

This chapter discusses this methodology in detail. It commences with discussion of action research as it relates to this work. It goes on to explain the design and implementation of the consultancy model and thirdly, it explains the approach to data collection and analysis.

Action research

Action research implies that research is conducted not only to describe, explain or understand a phenomenon but also to change it for the better (McNiff et al 1996). Elliott (1991) makes the same point:

The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The production and utilization of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim.

Elliott 1991 p. 49

This research is very much action-focused in the sense that it is trying out the consultancy tool in two organisations, refining it and retrying it to establish whether it can be improved. As Whitehead says action research is about asking the question "How can I improve the quality of my practice here?" (Whitehead 1989). It is not simply asking what is happening it is asking what changes can be made for the better. Certainly this project is about improving the quality of the consultancy tool by trying it out and changing it for the better.

McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) emphasise very strongly that the researcher is at the centre of the research, even to the point of advocating the appropriate use of the personal pronoun to emphasise that the researcher is the subject and object of the research. The practice of the individual conducting the research is under enquiry and the researcher has to be prepared to be self-critical. The findings section will show that this was at the centre of my thinking in carrying out the action research. I was involved with a continuous process of systematic self-critical thinking whilst using the model with the clients. This thinking was closely documented and reflected back to the clients for their views.

Elliott equates action research with Schön's concept of reflective practice (Schön 1983). Elliott emphasises that the reflection must be context bound. It

has to be judged in particular circumstances. My assessment of the value of the model arises from its use in the two organisations with whom it was tried. It is further recognised that the originating context of the Business School is relevant. The model is intended to develop into a product of the Business School and as such needed to be usable in that context.

According to McNiff, action research is essentially insider research. This work is insider research in the sense that I am a practitioner researching my own approaches but I am doing so in the context of an organisation to which I do not belong. I am an outsider coming in as a consultant. I am however, an insider to the organisation I work for (Sheffield Business School) which will, in future, develop and use the tool again.

Most authors emphasise the process of action research as involving a spiral of self-reflective cycles of planning a change; acting and observing the process and consequences of the change; reflecting on these processes and consequences; and then re-planning (Atweh, Kemmis and Weeks 1998). Kurt Lewin (1948), described as the father of action research, emphasised the cyclical process of identifying a problem, planning, acting and evaluating.

This cyclical, iterative process was certainly in evidence in my case. As the work with one client progressed I adapted and amended what I did both with them and with the other client. It may have been simpler, on reflection, if I had tried out the model with one client and then, following a process of reflection and amendment, tried it sequentially with another but the clients were keen to get started and the timing was good from their point of view. Also, it meant that I too could progress the work in a speedy timescale and meet the requirements of the Ed.D.

The cyclical process did, however, still take place. I learned important lessons from my experiences with each which improved the interactions with the other. At times this was quite explicit. If one client was pondering a difficult decision I would say what I had done with the other to see if it would assist their decision-making processes and it very often did. It either led to an imitation of the other or a reaction to it which took them in a new direction. For example, when ACE were struggling with the issue of whether or not to make questionnaire returns confidential, I was able to relate the choices which had been made by BSET on that issue. This led to a similar decision at ACE. So although there was not a strictly separated series of spirals of planning, observing, reflecting and re-planning, there was a sense of the evolution of ideas through an active and reflective process. As Kemmis and Wilkinson state:

In reality the process may not be as neat as this spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting suggests. The stages overlap, and initial plans quickly become obsolete in the light of learning from experience. In reality the process is likely to be more fluid, open and responsive. The criterion of success is not whether the participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong, authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices and the situations in which they practice.

Kemmis and Wilkinson. Chapter 2 in Atweh et al 1998 p.21

Thus what has developed in this research is a reflective, cyclical but diffuse set of learning experiences which have overlapped but which fed each other.

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A further important aspect of Action Research is that it is participatory. Indeed some authors describe the process as Participatory Action Research (Atweh et al, 1998). Similarly, Oja and Smulyan (1989) say

> Collaborative action research suggests that each group represented in the process shares in the planning, implementation, and analysis of the research and that each contributes different expertise and a unique perspective.

Oja and Smulyan 1989 p.1

In this research, collaboration was a key underpinning concept and as a consultant I worked in close collaboration with the two client organisations, with a group of supportive colleagues and with academic staff working on the Ed.D. programme. At stages throughout the work, interviews were set up with key participants in the process both at the two client organisations and at the Business School. These were carefully recorded and form a key part of the research data.

The great strength of Action Research is that it addresses the issues which people are dealing with thus avoiding the criticism of much research that it 'it is not applicable to my situation'. Thus in the case of these two clients, the research intimately concerned their needs and, symbiotically, my own because as I tried out the model we addressed their needs for concrete data and the way their organisations were working and learning. Part of the rationale for Action Research is that it can ensure social justice through inclusive collaboration and mutual self-development. In the case of BSET I

feel strongly that through the process, the management team at BSET and to some extent the whole staff there, developed their understanding of their organisation in a very deep manner and that my trial of the YOME was the vehicle for achieving that. This is very much in line with what can and should be achieved through action research:

> At its best, it is a collaborative social process of learning, realised by groups of people who join together in changing the practices through which they interact in a shared social world – a world in which, for better or for worse, we live with the consequences of each other's action.

Atweh et al 1998 p.22

Action Research is an essentially political process. As Burns (2000 p.453) points out, by the very act of participating in a piece of research, those actively involved in the work are rejecting the notion that the problem is out of their hands. They are taking action and recognising the potential power they have. They are cutting through the view that research is something done by academics in universities and taking the opportunity to use research as an underpinning for their day-to-day practice. This has certainly been the case with this work. In the case of BSET the involvement of every member of the team (from catering and cleaning staff to the Chief Adviser) has helped feed the notion that transforming that organisation is not only the responsibility of those at the top or subject to the whim of powerful external forces, it is the responsibility of everyone in the team and it recognises that there is power for change at all levels. Furthermore, an external catalyst or change agent can be a powerful stimulus for the recognition of where power lies and how it can be used.

The power issues at ACE are very interesting and will warrant further discussion but essentially the research has taken place in a highly politicised context and has been influenced by and in its turn influenced the politics of the organisation.

Elliott goes on to conceptualise action research as resolving the issue of the connection between theory and practice (Elliott 1991). Theory can be perceived by practitioners as threatening, distant, useless or too general and far too much the province of academics in higher education. Action research by teachers in schools was a challenge to the traditional craft culture there and the values which underpin that culture are threatened by the new concept of professionalism embodied in the action research movement. This fundamental change in professional behaviour is widespread and could be said to apply to the field of formal education and to the business world where those involved with the development of staff (as with my client ACE Conveyors) are recognising the importance of drawing upon theory to inform practice and changing theory as a result of analysing practice. In a number of ways, the theory/practice relationship was brought to the surface during the research. For example, at BSET, there was enthusiasm in some quarters for researching the current position with relation to the learning organisation whilst in other quarters there was a view that they simply needed to get on with improving the organisation and stop theorising about it all. In a strong and practical way, this resolution of the distinction between theory and practice was evident in the discussions we had about the action research and about the consultancy project within the organisation. I was actively resolving my theoretical dilemmas about the evaluation, about consultancy and about the model by working on a practical and useful process. Meanwhile, the clients

were resolving the theory/practice relationship with relation to the learning organisation concept.

Action research inevitably has low reliability but strong internal validity. It would be wrong to claim that the findings of this research with these two clients would be replicated in other circumstances. Every organisation is different so using YOME elsewhere could result in a different outcome but a similar quality of process. I worked with two organisations of approximately the same size. This had advantages in terms of taking practical lessons from one to another but does mean that working with a larger organisation could present completely different results (within a similarly systematic and rigorous process). One of the organisations was in the public sector and the other in the private which meant I could make some interesting comparisons (see chapters 4 and 5) However, it would be wrong to assume that because YOME has been reasonably successful in a public and in a private organisation it would be successful in them all. We can also never say what would be the impact of using the model in a voluntary/not-for-profit organisation. However, the fact that two very different organisations have been involved and some common patterns have emerged does seem to suggest that we can make some tentative conclusions about how the model might be perceived elsewhere and what would be the practical means of achieving validity in other contexts.

Action Research rejects the notion that the researcher is independent of the data. It challenges the orthodoxy about the role of the social scientist as the 'disinterested' observer of human affairs. In this research my role has been central and there is a sense in which I am not only trialling the model but also my own consultancy skills. I cannot know whether YOME would be received in

the same way should another consultant use it. What I need to do to make the model more widely useful is to address this issue in the analysis of the findings. Matters of handling of the model, including how many cycles/review stages should be involved, are as important as the model itself.

Bassey distinguishes three categories of educational research: theoretical research, evaluative research and action research (Bassey 1995). Perhaps the best way to look at this is that I am conducting action research to improve the consultancy tool, and subsequently professional practice, but the tool itself enables evaluative research to take place in the client organisations.

The research project

This section will cover the design of the research as a whole. It will discuss the implementation of the research on action research lines, explain how the consultancy model was put together; how the cases for testing it out were identified and how the data was collected and analysed.

Designing the action research as a whole

Elliott (1991 p. 72) identifies the activities of action research as identifying and clarifying the general idea; reconnaissance; constructing the general plan; developing the next action steps and implementing the next action steps. I will now take each of these in turn and relate them to the stages in my own action research.

1. *Identifying and clarifying the general idea.* This took place during the second year of Part One of the Ed.D. programme when three assignments were written. The first was on the similarities and differences between

evaluation and research; and the second on learning in organisations and society – the contribution of evaluation. These first two pieces helped establish the literature I was dealing with and clarify my own thoughts on what I was interested in pursuing. The research proposal constituted the third and final assignment. It was in this third assignment that I considered how I would, in the interests of pursuing something useful to my work, develop a consultancy tool and evaluate its effectiveness through action research. In my case the idea was that the evaluation of management development should be in the hands of the organisation which evaluates it but there is often no framework with which to work. So can a consultancy tool help that process of self-critical reflection to occur?

2. *Reconnaissance* involves describing the facts of the situation. In my case this was what kinds of organisations might welcome this kind of evaluation? What might a consultancy model look like? What kinds of issues might clients like to consider? What business and learning concepts might be included in the model? How will I know if it has worked?

3. *Constructing the general plan.* This was my research proposal completed for assignment 6 of the Part 1 of the degree. It consisted of the whole general idea behind the work and the philosophy within the design of the model (as discussed below). In my case this stage included brainstorming with colleagues about the theoretical underpinning of the model, discussing the choices within the model, access issues, and the validity of the research.

4. *Developing the next action steps.* In my case this involved:

a) Designing the consultancy model – with discussion and advice from colleagues

b) Finding suitable clients with whom to work

c) Making choices within the model – with subsequent review

d) Carrying out the research projects on the issues identified by the clients – with subsequent review

e) Feeding back to the clients on the findings – with subsequent review

f) Discussing action as a result of the consultancy work – with subsequent review

5. *Implementing the next action steps.* In action research this involves implementing a particular course of action as a result of the research. Often this can take a lot of time. In my case this involved changing the model as a result of working with the two clients. As a product of the action research, it is now ready to be marketed to a wider audience. Elliott emphasises that this may not be the end of the process and may generate ideas about future possibilities for further research.

Designing and implementing the model

In designing the Yates Options Model for Evaluation I had four guiding principles in my mind each of which needed to be evaluated through the action research: client choice; a staged process; a research foundation; good presentation. This thinking came from the literature review which stressed the importance of client choice both in evaluation and in consultancy. An understanding of the principles behind the design of the model is essential in determining its effectiveness. Therefore, for the action research to be effective, the reader must be aware of how it was designed.

I shall now take each guiding principle in turn to explain the process used to draw up the model.

Client choice

Having read widely on the evaluation of management development it was very clear to me that any evaluation should suit the purpose of the evaluator and should be tailor-made to the needs of the organisation. (Wills 1993; Lewis and Thornhill 1994) The literature on consultancy also emphasised the importance of client choice rather than the imposition of solutions which did not have ownership in the organisation (Tranfield and Smith 1991; Margerison 1988 and Wrennal 1998). For this reason, my underpinning philosophy in the design of the model was to build a framework for choice. The framework would include tried and tested concepts and theories, such as the Learning Organisation concept, but the essential thinking was that whatever happened, the client would need to choose their own evaluation approach. The model therefore included choices concerning what they would evaluate, how they would evaluate it, how they wanted the results to be presented and what actions they would take as a result.

Inevitably, they often needed help to make the decisions. This was where I, as consultant, had to keep a careful balance between advising on the implications of different choices and still leaving the client to make the final decision. The problem I anticipated was that sometimes choices would be made which I would not have made myself. In the spirit of empowerment of the client I would need to allow them to be 'wrong' in my eyes. My role was to warn them of the potential implications of those choices but then allow them to continue. This became quite a dilemma at times because I would be the

person having to follow through on the decision and undertake the subsequent research and become the person who would be associated with that approach.

Coming back to the action research, it was important for me to know whether the model and my use of it was achieving choice and that choice was an appropriate aim. In order for me to evaluate this, questions were included in the review interviews on just those issues and the views of those involved were systematically recorded.

Staged process

The four stages to the model were the 'What' phase (what do you want to evaluate?), the 'How' phase (how do you want to do that?), the 'Results' phase (how do you want the results to be presented?) and the 'Action' phase (how should we progress this work from now on?). There were three purposes to these stages: firstly, they would encourage careful reflection; secondly, a structure would be there for the client giving them an opportunity to find their way through a complex set of ideas; and finally, the four stages imply that this is a finite project - it enabled me to close the process off and withdraw from my consultancy role in the organisation (as advised by Tranfield and Smith 1991).

As part of the design process I included choices concerning whether the exercise was designed to evaluate the impact of the programme on the individuals who had attended, on their behaviour back on the job or the impact of the programme on the organisation as a whole. Inevitably this is a fundamental and basic distinction which has major implications for further choices which are made down the line. So, immediately a decision-tree

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structure began to evolve. One choice made at one level in the model opened another series of choices up and effectively closed others off. What I also wanted to ensure was that the client was not confined only to the choices which were already built in to the model. There needed to be some freedom for the discussion process which led to the choices to be free and wide-ranging and therefore to possibly lead to decisions which were outside or tangential to the framework of the model. An overview of the model is included on the next page. Please see the full model in Appendix 1.

The action research again addressed the issue of the staged process. Questions were asked on whether the stages were appropriate, whether they were clear to the user, whether they were in the right order and whether further stages needed to be added.

FIGURE 2. THE YATES OPTIONS MODEL FOR EVALUATION
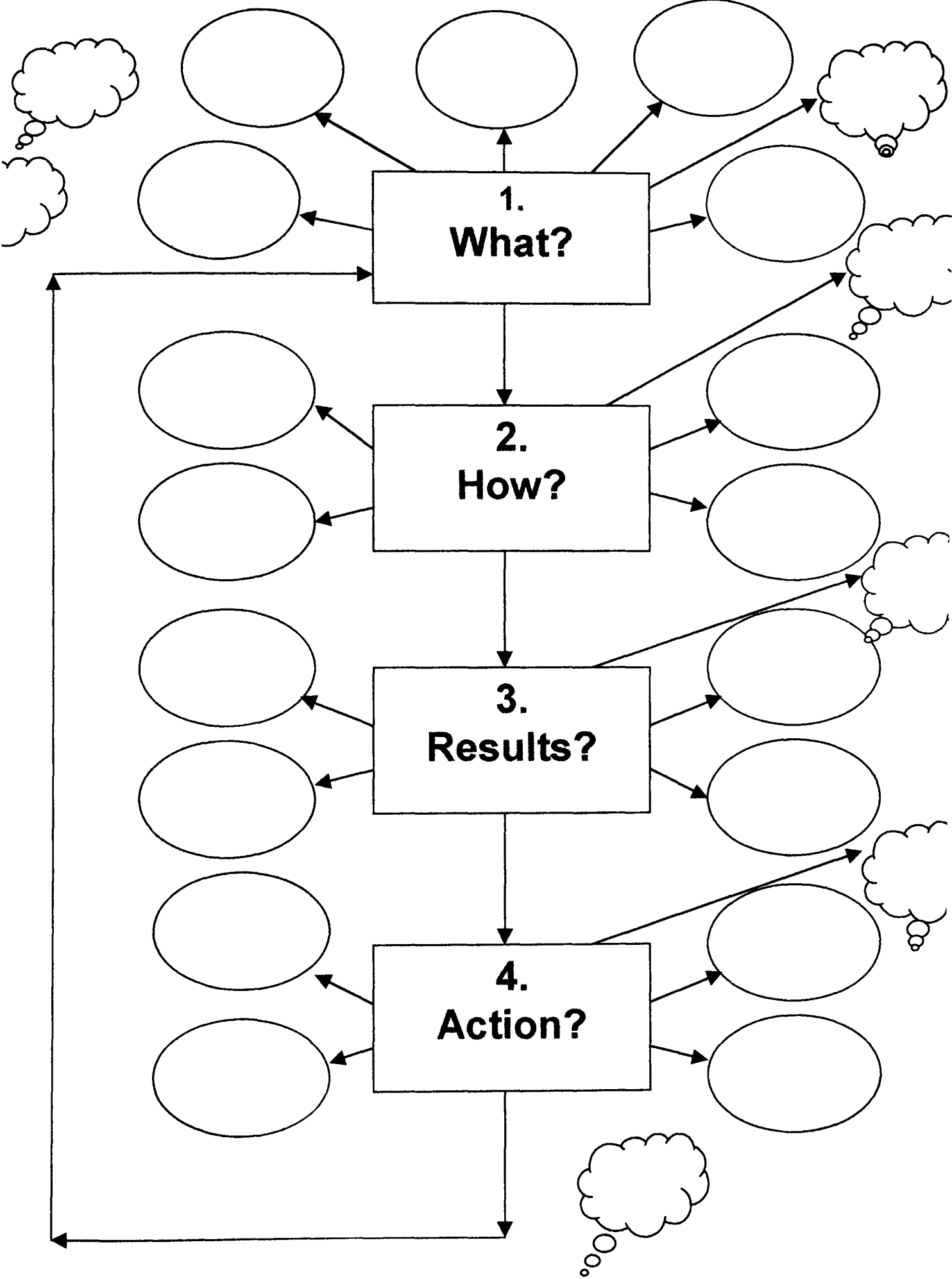
A research foundation

When designing the model, I tried to keep in mind the principles of good research and to make clear to the client that this was what I was offering to them. I feel that this thinking was not well-formed in my own mind at first but as the two cases progressed it became very clear. At BSET, the key opposite number, the Chief Adviser, Heather Scott, was very clear about the need for a strong research underpinning to the consultancy work. She considered that this would give it credibility and really ground any future action coming as a consequence of the work in the views of the people in the organisation. My understanding of what she meant by this was that there should be no planning for the development of the organisation without carrying out systematic study of the views of the staff about what the current situation was and how development should be achieved. She clearly felt that a rigorous research methodology should underpin her organisation's plans for the future.

Part of the thinking about making the model work as a research tool was that it needed to reflect the ideas I had read in the literature about good evaluation. Parlett and Hamilton's seminal work (1977) was particularly influential and made me face up to the need to be looking at the issues from a number of different angles at once, whether that be from the viewpoints of different actors and stakeholders or in terms of using several methods of research to cross-confirm findings (in other words to triangulate the results).

Again, discussion of the appropriateness of a systematic research focus formed part of the review interviews as the work progressed.

Good presentation

It was important to me to present the model to the client in a way which was meaningful and useful. For this reason I drew up a series of choices in Microsoft PowerPoint and loaded them on to a lap top computer for presentation to the client. This way I could move about the model during the course of our discussions and remind the clients of decisions they had made earlier and how these might impact on their thinking in the next stage.

At the point where I was still seeking a client with whom to try out the model, I was approached by the Course Leader for the HND Computing at Sheffield Hallam University to ask if I had any projects which might be suitable for a group of computing students to undertake. Typically these would be web page design, databases, spreadsheets etc with the students acting as consultants. I was optimistic that the students could convert my PowerPoint presentation into something more user-friendly, possibly using project management software or similar. We had a series of meetings at which I made the brief clear, they informed me of their progress and finally they made a presentation to me in which I was involved in the assessment.

In the end the group failed to substantially improve on what I had already prepared due to their own lack of commitment and expertise. However, I was glad to have given them an opportunity to work on something 'real' and they did give me a couple of good ideas which I have subsequently included. Firstly, they suggested that the model could be customised for each client. They proposed an easily adapted front page which would include the names of the organisation and the people with whom I would be working. Secondly, they suggested that it should be designed so as to build a report of the

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decisions which would be made, a summary of which could be printed out at the end of a meeting with the client or, indeed at any stage in the process.

Despite the group's inability to make substantial changes, I did incorporate these two ideas into my own PowerPoint presentation. I now have different versions of YOME for each organisation and they include slides which are unique to those organisations. I also used changed colour schemes to denote where decisions had been made.

A further aspect of presentation was the whole decision about what to call the model and, particularly whether to use my name in its title. I was advised in the Business School (by marketing staff) to 'brand the product' with my name and, indeed to protect it with copyright, patent or licensing arrangements. Putting my own name on it would assist with that branding process and ensure that I was credited with the design. However, natural modesty made me uncomfortable with this. I am still trying to overcome this!

The research interviews also addressed presentation issues. I asked the clients how important they considered presentation to be; whether they wanted paper or computerised versions; whether they wanted something to take away or needed me to talk them through it; and whether it was user friendly.

Identification of Cases

At the start of the research I had obtained a very clear commitment from City of York Council to take forward an earlier evaluation of their management development programme in order to look at the impact of the programme on

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the organisation itself. (The earlier work had concentrated on the views of participants, their line managers and their co-workers). Despite efforts to take this project forward, changes in senior management in the authority and a change of personnel responsible for the management development programme meant that the commitment there to take the work forward suddenly disappeared. Unfortunately this was not made clear to me until later than I would have hoped. This left me with no organisation to work with and a fear that the whole project might fail.

I therefore put out feelers with other organisations with whom I was working and amongst my contacts in the business community. My only criteria were that the organisation needed to have invested in some form of management development and have a clear wish to evaluate their progress with it. Although I have always worked with public sector organisations in the past, I had an open mind about trying out the model with private firms and I felt that this would address a potential criticism that it might not apply there. Similarly, I was open to possibilities of working with whole organisations or with departments or sections within them as this seemed also to be appropriate.

After a period of great uncertainty in the research I finally (through a mutual friend) obtained an appointment with the Human Resources Director of ACE Conveyor Equipment Ltd, a medium-sized enterprise in the Doncaster area involved in the manufacture, installation and repair of conveyor belts on a nation-wide basis. Sue Drohan is Human Resource Director in this family firm which was founded by her father and of which her husband is Executive Director and her son is Engineering Director. Sue is a former primary school head teacher and has a deep commitment to learning amongst the individuals in the company and for the company as a whole. The company had made

some investment in management development and had also embarked on a project which they called Shaping the Future, a key part of which, interestingly, was the intention to build a learning organisation. When Sue heard what I had to say about YOME she was very positive that it could be extremely valuable in taking the company forward into the next stages. Having informed Sue of the commitment which would be required from the company it was agreed that we would go ahead and an appointment was made for the first stage choices to be made.

Only a few weeks after this I was attending a meeting which had already been arranged with Heather Scott, Chief Adviser at Barnsley School Effectiveness Team (BSET). The Business School had been working with BSET to deliver some management development workshops with Head Teachers and aspiring Heads in the area. It was a project on which I had taken the lead. As a result I had already built up a close working partnership with Heather and with other staff in the organisation. Our intention in the meeting was to discuss writing and publishing an article about our experiences. With her agreement, I first discussed the possibility of trying out the YOME with BSET and her reaction was enthusiastic. BSET had spent a year looking at their own approaches to management and making substantial changes. Again, part of what they were now aiming to achieve was the development of the learning organisation. Again we decided to set up a meeting to take the evaluation forward.

In both cases I asked the clients to take part in the research on the usefulness of the model on the basis of a no-cost interaction. I explained that in time it was intended that the Business School would charge for YOME at its usual consultancy rates (£600 per day) but that as the purpose of this exercise was to evaluate the model we would do it without charge. The quid pro quo would

be that I would like to conduct interviews with the collaborators in the project in order to establish their views of the model at several stages in its progress. Both organisations happily committed themselves to these interviews. In order to establish whether cost would have been a factor in the choices made, I asked the question 'Had you needed to pay for this work to be done would you still have done it?' The responses to this question are included in the Findings.

Obtaining wider commitment in the client organisations

In both cases, establishing agreement with the key person had been straightforward. However, it was also important to obtain wider commitment from those involved with the project. In the case of ACE Conveyors, the key person to involve was the Executive Director, Rob Drohan. Sue always invited Rob to attend our meetings and take part in our lengthy discussions. As husband and wife there were personal factors in their relationship of which I was very aware and which were extremely relevant to the way the company operated and the way the research was perceived. It was impossible to separate these personal issues from the work itself. Rob came in and out of our meetings when he had the time but as a result he missed some of the most crucial elements of the discussion and inevitably sometimes made points which had already been covered. In order to address the issue of obtaining wider commitment, Sue invited another senior manager, this time from one of the regional offices, to join in the choices stage of the project. This individual manager later turned out to have quite a negative effect on the activity and this was connected to a wider disillusionment with the company and its management. His impact was small but the effect that only one person can have on an action research project such as this is discussed in Chapter 5.

At BSET, Heather Scott's commitment to a research focus and to systematic analysis of the progress of the organisation towards its learning organisation goal was not entirely shared by her colleagues. It was decided from the outset to make the choices in the model with the senior management team which consisted of five Senior Advisers (in addition to the Chief Adviser). This was a very deliberate attempt to obtain the commitment of a wider number of people in the organisation. As such it was successful. There was some constructively expressed criticism that what action was needed was to become a learning organisation rather than to analyse progress towards this goal. This was countermanded with the view that they needed to assess their current position so that they could move forward more effectively. In the literature on evaluation the point is made that there will always be concern that spending time on evaluation might be perceived as better spent elsewhere (Currie 1994).

The lesson from this whole process and the problems faced with it is that consideration about who is involved with the research is very important and even warrants a phase within the model. The Findings chapter reinforces the point that a 'Who?' phase should be included in the YOME itself.

Approach to data collection and analysis

This section discusses the way in which data from the two case studies was collected, recorded and analysed. For clarity it is important to first make the distinction between the research for my evaluation of YOME and the research for the client organisations. In both BSET and ACE, I carried out a research project on issues which they identified as important and on which they wished to solicit the views of their staff. For example ACE managers were particularly

interested in perceptions of their so-called 'Shaping the Future' project within

which there was an objective to develop the learning organisation. At BSET

the interest was in assessing to what extent they already demonstrated the

characteristics of a learning organisation (in the views of the staff). Those

research projects were thorough, rigorous and valuable for the organisations

concerned. They formed part of testing out the model. However, the details of

those consultancy projects will not be the central emphasis here. The focus of

this section and indeed of the thesis as a whole must be on the way that

YOME itself was perceived as a learning and development tool and the means

I used to collect, record and analyse data on that.

Given that my action research was to take place over a period of eight months

and given my many other commitments it was obvious from the start that a

careful process of record-keeping was going to be an essential pre-requisite to

success in the exercise. As part of this, recording data with reference back to

the research questions seemed a good way to encourage reflection and self-

critical evaluation as I progressed through the cycles of the action research.

So the strategy for gaining useful findings of the research was integrated with

the research design at the start of the project. I felt it was important to devote

considerable time to the creation of an infrastructure for receiving the findings

and acting upon them.

As a result I set up two types of record. The first I called the Record of

Interaction. An example is included in Appendix 3. Each Record of Interaction

(ROI) had a unique chronological number which helped me find information

and demonstrated the logical progression of the research. The ROI included

details of who had been involved in the interaction (i.e. present at meetings,

discussing something on the phone, taking part in an event etc); when it took

place; how long it lasted; and which stage in the research it took place (What, How, Results or Action). There was then a description of the interaction, a discussion of its meaning for the research and some reflection with relation to the research questions. This was very successful in making me reflect and giving me ideas for the next stage.

Secondly, I kept records of the interviews I had undertaken in which I had asked participants in the process what they thought of the model and how things were going. These interviews were carried out either face-to-face or on the telephone and were semi-structured in nature. They asked a series of questions which were essentially related back to the overall research questions for the thesis. The date, respondent and means of interviewing were also recorded. Interviews were carried out at each of what I considered to be appropriate stages in the research (See Appendix 2). Interviews took place with members of the management team in each organisation who had been involved with the choices made within the model and had seen the outcome in terms of the presentation of the findings.

To reiterate, the stages of the action research project as a whole were:

a) Designing the consultancy model – with discussion and advice from colleagues

b) Finding suitable clients with whom to work and holding the initial meeting to obtain commitment

c) Making choices within the model – with subsequent review

d) Carrying out specific research studies on the issues identified by the clients

e) Feeding back to the clients on the findings – with subsequent review

f) Discussing action as a result of the consultancy work – with subsequent review

Stage b) was rejected as a point at which to review the effectiveness of the model because the clients had too little information to go on (although some general comments were made about how useful it looked like being). I carried out interviews immediately after the choices stage, after the presentation of the findings and after the action phase. I also rejected doing interviews after the data collection phase because the clients had spent a lot of time with me and were weary of it all. Also, they were just eager to know the outcome and impatient for some action.

Carrying out interviews at these various stages enabled me to reflect continually on what was happening and come away from what I was learning about their organisations and back to what I was learning about the model. This reflection was assisted by the fact that I presented a paper on the research to the EDINEB (Educational Innovation in Economics and Business) conference in June 2000.

In order to present and analyse the findings of the data I have felt that it is essential to be systematic in my approach. I considered what method to use to analyse this mountain of words. I rejected computer analysis as unnecessary because the data were already recorded in a way which gave a structure and place for reflection. Instead what I have adopted is what Hussey and Hussey (1997 p.258) call General Analytical Procedure.

General analytical procedure involves a series of logical steps. I shall comment on each as it applies to this research.

1. Convert any rough field notes you have made into some form of written record which you and your supervisors will still be able to understand in later months. When writing your field notes you may wish to add your own thoughts and reflections. This will be the start of your tentative analysis. You should distinguish your interpretations and speculation from your actual field notes.

   Comment: I did exactly this with my ROIs, interview notes and research diary.

2. Ensure than any material you have collected from interviews, observations or original documents is properly referenced. The reference should indicate who was involved, the date and time, the context, the circumstances leading to the data collection and the possible implications for the research. You may find it useful to record your references on a *pro-forma* summary sheet, which you can then keep in an indexed system for ease of retrieval.

   Comment: My ROIs and interviews were properly referenced but because I kept them separately for the two organisations I did not feel it was necessary to use a pro-forma.

3. Start coding data as soon as possible. This will involve allocating a specific code to each variable, concept or theme that you identify. The code may be allocated to a specific word or phrase and the use of exemplars is helpful in applying the code and explaining its significance in your thesis. The code will allow you to store the data, retrieve it and recognise it in a

variety of ways. You will find it easier if you start with as many codes as you feel necessary and later collapse them into a smaller number.

Comment: I read through all the data and formulated codes which relate to the research questions. There are four research questions and in reading through the data it has become evident that points are being made which are of relevance to each of those research questions. Where I consider these points as relevant and important to answering the research questions, I have given them a code number. So, I have categorised responses into a number of codes within each research question. Therefore, if I think a point relates to Research Question 1, Point A it will have the code 1A.

4. When data is coded, you can start grouping codes into smaller categories according to patterns or themes which emerge. This is not a mechanical task, but will require some considerable effort and thought. If you are not using a strong theoretical framework, do not attempt to impose categories, but allow them to emerge from the data. Compare new data as it is collected with your existing codes and categories, and modify them as required.

Comment: In a sense this process is collapsed with point 3 as I have been systematic in my recording of the data against my general categories as I have progressed.

5. At various stages write summaries of your findings at that point. The discipline of putting your thoughts on paper will help your analysis and highlight any deficiencies to be remedied.

Comment: This has been ongoing and included in the reflections at the end of the ROIs and in my research diary.

6. Use your summaries to construct generalisations with which you can confront existing theories or use to construct a new theory.

   Comment: This is the process you will see evidenced in the findings section.

7. Continue the process until you are satisfied that the generalisations arising from your data are sufficiently robust to stand the analysis of existing theories or the construction of a new theory.

   Comment: The outcome of this stage will be clear from the conclusions to the thesis.

Hussey and Hussey 1997 *p.258*

Research Ethics

As the research methodology literature suggests there are certain common issues with relation to ethics which should be taken into consideration (Hussey and Hussey 1997, Burns, 2000). With relation to this research topic there are, in a sense, two sets of responses to the ethical issues raised by the research. The first set of responses relate to the consultancy studies carried out in the client organisations and the second relates to the action research. The full details of how these projects were handled are explained in Chapter 4 but I would like to pull out some specific ethical issues which emerged with relation to each. I will take these two sets of responses under three headings: confidentiality/anonymity; informed consent; and publication.

In the case of the consultancy studies in the two client organisations, the main data collection method was to send a questionnaire to all staff to discover their views on the learning organisation. A covering letter informed the respondent of the purpose of the exercise and how the data would be used. It assured them of the confidentiality of the responses and that only aggregate data would be used to form conclusions on the outcome of the study. Respondents were not asked their names and in general these were not known. At ACE a number of interviews also took place with some staff and then anonymity could not be provided. Nevertheless confidentiality was assured.

In both consultancy studies, respondents were fully aware of the purpose of the data research, how data was to be collected and used, and to whom it would be presented. Therefore, the principles of informed consent were adhered to. The presentation of the findings of the consultancy studies was entirely for internal use. Therefore, at ACE I presented a report to the Board of Directors and at BSET to the whole staff at their annual conference. I did not reveal the source of specific views to senior management in either case and the aggregate results were used as intended to feed back into organisational development processes.

In the case of the action research as a whole a different set of responses to the demand for ethical approaches to the research arose. When the initial identification of cases took place I was fortunate to find one public sector and one private sector organisation. The circumstances and environment in each organisation was very different and those different environments were very relevant to the issues of management development on which we were discussing. From the outset I was clear with both clients that I would be happy

to describe them as Organisation A and Organisation B but neither saw a need for this and felt that their purpose and context were too important to anonymise the names. They were, therefore, perfectly happy for me to call the organisations by their actual names. As far as the respondents to the interviews were concerned the same view was expressed. The nature of the personalities involved and their positions in the organisation was inextricably bound up with the views they were expressing. For this reason they were happy to be named and saw no need for anonymity. As the work progressed and I was often discovering quite personal issues and views I reiterated my questions about anonymity but again their response was the same. They were happy to be named. As I gave this more thought I became concerned that the respondents were unaware of the sensitivity of some of the views they were expressing so I asked again about anonymity. Again they were unconcerned about it and I began to feel that there was no need to change names. As the title of the thesis does not include the names of the organisations it is unlikely that a reader would come to this thesis looking for information about these two specific clients. It would be more likely that they were looking for writing on the evaluation of management development and the names of cases are incidental. In any case the consent was clearly informed and reiterated on several occasions. I have, therefore, felt comfortable in reporting individual views with relation to the action research.

Conclusion

The research methodology for this piece of research, drawing as it does on concepts of Action Research, is essentially iterative, qualitative and participatory. By a process of establishing the problem (how to evaluate the impact of management development on an organisation); designing an

approach and a model (YOME); trying it out (with BSET and ACE); and reflecting on what happened I have been able to be self-critical and reflective in a way which takes account of the views of key participants. It has been collaborative and yet focused towards my objectives as researcher. It has been structured and yet fluid enough to cope with changing requirements. It has been theoretical in that it has forced me to think deeply and in conceptual terms about what I am doing and yet practical enough to develop a model which is of direct use in organisations. For these reasons I feel that the methodology I have chosen has been appropriate and useful to the achievement of the objectives of the research.

CHAPTER 4 - CASE STUDIES

Introduction

In Chapter 4 I will relate the history of the two case studies which formed the object of the action research. In each case I carried out research projects for the clients as a result of the application of the YOME. These need some explanation in order to provide the context for the dissertation action research. The case studies will also explain how, in each case, I gathered data on how well the process worked and the value of using the model. The two cases have their similarities and their differences. These have implications for the findings and are, therefore, discussed immediately after the account of the two cases. Chapters 4 and 5 should be read together as they constitute the findings of the thesis. The discussion of the cases leads in to the analysis of the findings. The analysis is presented with relation to the research questions rather than on a case by case basis so it draws on both cases to illuminate the findings.

So, the format of these two chapters shows how the studies completed for the two clients sit within the general consultancy process which in its turn sits within the action research on how well the whole process works.

ACE Case Study

(An organisation chart for ACE Conveyor Equipment Ltd is included in Appendix 8)

Establishing contact and planning the work

Sue Drohan (Human Resource Director at ACE Conveyor Equipment Ltd) and I have a mutual friend who, when I mentioned my frustration at being unable

to find a suitable organisation with which to work on my model, suggested her name. She described Sue as interested in learning (as she is a former primary head teacher) and in organisational development. In her time as HR Director she had made substantial changes including the introduction of an Investors in People programme and a plan to become a 'World Class Manufacturer' through a project they were calling Shaping the Future. So, I wrote to Sue and asked to meet her with a view to doing some work together. She was immediately enthusiastic and we arranged an appointment to discuss the research. At our first meeting on 12th April, 2000, I explained the model and the action research around it. She talked me through the history of the company and her involvement in it. She emphasised that it is a family firm founded by her father but which has now been led by her husband Rob Drohan for the last ten years. She came into the company six years ago to develop appraisal, personal developments plans and training and development for the future.

The company has 94 employees operating in Scotland, the North East, Midlands, Cornwall and Wales with a central operation and headquarters in Doncaster. They supply, maintain and repair conveyor equipment systems in many different contexts but mostly aggregates and other bulk products.

The company had embarked on a programme of management development through a taught course as long ago as 1995 with one cohort of 30 managers going through a twelve day programme in 95/6 and a further cohort of 12 going through in 97/8. They had built in evaluation to that and used the feedback to improve the approach for cohort two. They went on to develop a continuous personal development model for the whole company, which included training and development and a systematic appraisal system. They

also benchmarked themselves against the Business Excellence model as developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management which is now gaining ground as a model for assessing and developing the quality of management systems and approaches in organisations. They went on to develop their plans for a learning organisation through an initiative which they call Shaping the Future, Sharing Success. This incorporates elements of personal development, measurement against Key Performance Indicators and the use of the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton 1992) which takes into account four perspectives on the performance of the company.

During our first meeting, I showed the Yates Options Model for Evaluation to Sue and presented her with the key underpinning concept of the model i.e. that it involves choice on the part of the client and was not, therefore, an attempt by me to come in and judge what was happening. It was very much about obtaining understanding through dialogue and acting on that in ways the company would consider appropriate. Sue was immediately attracted to the model because it incorporated the concept of the learning organisation (to which they were already committed) and it was a very early decision to focus on that rather than other elements of YOME. Sue was familiar with Senge, Argyris and other authors in the field and was attracted to the concept of the learning organisation by its all-embracing nature and the fact that it recognises the importance of softer issues of management such as people skills and communication as well as the harder more operational and market skills the company also required but which she felt sometimes had too much precedence.

It was agreed that I would return to the company to consider the options more carefully and discuss the plans with a wider circle of mangers. So, on 4th May

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2000 I attended a five hour meeting with Sue and Alan Trippier, one of the regional managers. Rob Drohan appeared at the beginning but didn't stay and returned later to make his own inputs.

We spent about four hours discussing issues in the company which warranted analysis and we gradually made choices within the model. For much of the time the model acted as a means of structuring the discussion but was often more of a springboard to more talk than a means of pinning down the selection. In particular there was discussion about four issues. Firstly, the skills the company now needed in order to move forward had changed as technology developed and the market had changed. Secondly, there had been a change from a small family firm where extremely committed and able top managers could closely supervise everyone's work to a medium-sized enterprise operating through a regional structure where there had to be effective delegation at operational level. Thirdly, the view was expressed that as a result of the Shaping the Future project they had become quite introspective and fault-finding internally and that possibly this was having an effect on morale. Finally, there were profound developments at the top of the organisation with Rob still wishing to lead, learn and control; his son developing his skills somewhat in the shadow of his father; and Sue coping with being the only woman on a Board where the priority was immediate business problem-solving rather than long term organisational development.

As the discussion developed, choices were made from those in the model but, in addition, other possibilities were considered. For example, it was decided that some of the ideas of Hersey and Blanchard (1993) on follower readiness were very relevant and should be included. We decided to carry out a series of interviews with staff using a semi-structured interview schedule. The

interviews would act as a pilot for the questionnaire which would go to a 100% sample of employees in the company.

The study for ACE

Following this second meeting I devised a research plan which detailed the research questions, methodology, data collection methods and issues in the research. Included was a draft of the interview schedule which would later (with amendments) become the written questionnaire. Essentially the purpose of this research was to consider the extent to which ACE was a learning organisation; how their movement in that direction had impacted on individual motivation; and how the organisation managed diversity through recognising the different follower readiness of staff.

In the course of doing the research we recognised from the beginning that there were some difficult issues involved. We were dealing with some very soft, emotional issues on which it would be difficult to obtain hard answers or quantifiable results. There was a risk that we would raise concerns in the workforce, and the whole thing would take a lot of time and commitment. In my turn I was conscious of having to test out the model, not just find out what ACE wanted to know.

At the next meeting Sue and I went through the draft questionnaire adding, deleting and generally improving the draft and the plans to administer it. Our questionnaire was to be supplemented with the learning organisation jig-saw questionnaire from Pedler et al (1997). It was recognised that some of the questions needed to be slightly amended depending on whether the respondents were operatives or managers and that role of the respondent in

the organisation should also be recorded so that we could later analyse differences in the responses according to jobs roles.

The data collection phase for the ACE research occurred between 31st May when the first face-to-face interviews took place and the end of July when all the written questionnaires finally came in (See Appendix 2). Owing to holidays for all concerned and many other commitments at the time (not least with the other case on which I was working: Barnsley School Effectiveness Team), there was a break between data collection and analysis but the presentation of the findings to the Board proved to be the spur I needed to analyse the results.

Outcome and follow-up

I prepared a written report and some PowerPoint slides to present on my lap top computer to the Board meeting of 18th September, 2000. Sue's attempts to have the work taken seriously were treated rather dismissively by the rest of the Board. They had just emerged from dealing with some very problematic issues but it was very clear that some of the family relationships and gender issues were behind a general reluctance to listen to the findings of the research. I was given half an hour in which to present the findings. Sue and I had intended to work with the Board on the Action stage of the model but it soon became obvious that the Board members were ready to get away.

Immediately after the Board meeting I had a long discussion with Sue which dealt with some fairly personal issues for her but which led to a clear plan for action to make good use of the findings. Sue took this plan away and implemented it immediately by discussing the study at length with her husband and obtaining an agreement to present the findings to an imminent meeting of

the whole management team a few days after the Board meeting. She went on to include a summary of the results of the study in a newsletter to all staff and she asked for and received a wide range of comments from the article. She then drew up plans to act upon what had been learned, particularly with a view to improving the communication of ideas and new developments around the company.

In an interview with Sue three and a half months later we had a chance to reflect on what had happened and it very quickly became clear that the Board meeting had been a real turning point both for the company's approaches to people management and for Sue's working relationship with the other members on the Board. The research we had done had been widely disseminated in the Company and had been used as a basis for further planning and for improving communications. The research had stimulated people to think about the way understanding of the concept of the learning organisation was shared in the Company and there was a general raising of awareness of the importance of human resource and communications issues in the Company.

Interviews for the action research

In all with ACE I conducted five interviews for the action research – four with Sue Drohan and one with Alan Trippier. The reasons for this were to do with availability, commitment to the project and ensuring appropriate timing. Interviews took place with Sue and Alan after the choices stage. Then Alan left the organisation and it was not possible to continue involving him. It was very clear from previous discussions that Rob's involvement would have been inappropriate (as he saw this as Sue's project and was unhappy about

committing too much time to it). So the interviews after the results and action phases took place with Sue.

BSET Case Study

(An organisation chart for Barnsley School Effectiveness Team is included in Appendix 9)

<u>Establishing contact and planning the work</u>

During October and November 1999, Sheffield Business School developed and delivered a series of management development workshops for Head Teachers and aspiring Heads in Barnsley. This had been a response to an approach from Barnsley School Effectiveness Team (BSET) which is the advisory team at the Local Education Authority. This initiative was in recognition of a need to develop the managerial abilities of Head Teachers and it was felt that it would be valuable to bring in a broad business perspective from a Business School rather than continue to use University Education Departments which were perceived as having a narrower focus. BSET (in its current form) had been in existence for approximately one year following an OFSTED review which had made serious criticisms of the LEA's approaches to school improvement. The newly-appointed Chief Adviser, Heather Scott, had made substantial inroads into challenging the organisational culture which had led them to this negative inspection report. Following the management development sessions, Heather expressed a desire to review internal management approaches within the team and had requested the assistance of SBS in doing so.

In April 2000, I discussed the possibility of using YOME as a framework for evaluation of the Team's current position and a means of moving forward. Heather was agreeable to this but felt that it was important to share ownership of the approach with a wider team. Hence, I circulated a brief summary of the approach round the Management Team with a view to preparing them for a discussion at their next meeting. At that meeting on 5th May 2000, I talked through my thinking and there was approximately an hour's discussion on the choices open to them. I found even at this very early stage that there was an enthusiasm to jump to the How phase and we talked quite a lot about the potential of the School Effectiveness Team Day on 20th July as a forum for taking this forward. It was recognised that this was not the forum nor the time for doing the whole Choices stage so a further discussion arose about who should be involved with this. This is an aspect which is thoroughly explored in the Findings section of the Action Research but also formed a key part of the consultancy study for BSET. There were differing views on the Management Team about whether what the Team needed was strong leadership from the top or a more participative and consensual style. This was important in determining whether the Management Team (consisting of 5 people) or a wider group should be making the choices. Whilst this was a lengthy discussion which led to some disagreement it was clearly an important issue to decide who should be involved in making the choices. It brought home very starkly the need for a 'Who' phase in the model.

It was decided that I would attend the next meeting of the same group and that this would be devoted to the choices stage. This took place on 19th May. It began by looking at the management development work that had already been done in the Team. This consisted mainly of individuals attending a variety of different management courses ranging from a few days here and

there (including our workshops for Heads) through to MSc courses. The point was made that they needed to focus on the senior advisers now: they had been 'too busy looking after the oarsmen to look after the captain's cabin'.

The study for BSET

A number of issues for concern were seen as potentially useful areas for the study. Team members had already committed themselves to becoming a learning organisation and this was stated in a number of planning documents. Therefore, they wanted to review where they were in that developing process. One aspect of this was that the Team was fairly fragmented and needed to know itself better. For example, their Performing Arts Development Service (partly because it operated peripatetically using mostly part-time staff) was rather detached from the rest of the Team. Similarly, the Governor Services were a branch apart and this was partly due to a physical separation of the offices. So relationships were felt to be a key part of the work.

In the second meeting I was conscious of the complexity of making these choices in a team. Five people with different views will struggle to reach a consensus. We used the learning organisation jig-saw to help focus our minds (Pedler et al 1997) and at one point a consensus seemed to be emerging that what they wanted to concentrate on was the 'learning climate', 'enabling structures' and 'participative policy-making' (to use Pedler's terminology). Gradually it became clear that there was a lot of post-OFSTED weariness in the group and that the discussion was losing its way. One participant felt that theorising in this way may be needed but the most important thing was to just get on and become a learning organisation. There was a need to act, not theorise.

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It was decided to circulate the learning organisation jig-saw in the form of a questionnaire. Respondents would be asked to rate each criterion within each jig-saw piece on a Likert scale to show how close they thought BSET was to being in line with that criterion. They would also be asked to prioritise the pieces of the jig-saw in terms of what should now be done at BSET. In the course of the discussion I advised the Group that to set up Likert scales on 55 different issues to do with the learning organisation would produce a challenging and difficult questionnaire to complete and that this would probably have an impact on response rates. The client felt, however, that they wanted this detailed level of information and that it was worth the risk to continue in that way.

The questionnaires were distributed and respondents were asked to return them to me at Sheffield Business School in order to ensure confidentiality. Reply-paid envelopes were provided and encouragement given to return them to a deadline. The Chief Adviser included an individualised letter in corporate colours which stated that individual views would be treated in confidence and that the findings would be used to inform strategy. It also asked if anyone would be prepared to be interviewed in connection with the study. In the event no-one volunteered.

Outcome and follow up

The questionnaires were received over a period from 2nd – 14th June. There was a 28% response rate and, although they were anonymous, there was a feeling that most of the respondents were from the advisory team and management rather than from the clerical and support staff. An analysis was completed and presented to the School Effectiveness Team Day on 20th July.

The findings demonstrated very starkly that most people felt that there were tremendous strengths in some areas which contribute to a successful learning organisation, particularly: internal support and exchange of ideas; good understanding of the external environment; and a willingness to learn. Weak areas included information technology systems and supportive accounting processes. Most people saw participative policy-making and enabling structures for participation as a high priority for action and although accounting systems were a weak area they should be a lower priority.

The presentation of the findings and the subsequent discussion were both useful means of checking the validity of the model and of the consultancy process. The discussion raised important issues about sharing ownership of the study in the client organisation. I discovered that the questionnaires were not returned in higher numbers because some of the potential respondents found the language in them unfamiliar and the whole process took a long time. They also did not realised that the results would be presented at the Team Day and they had not been informed of its importance in strategy. As the wording of the covering letter was out of my hands, I could not have addressed this. However, it has taught me to pay very close attention to the way such surveys are presented to the target group.

Subsequent to the Team Day, I had the flip chart sheets from the group discussion typed up and I sent them along with the statistical findings to the Management Team. Subsequently I had an extremely busy period at work and the BSET was in its usual state of turmoil. For a long time, Heather Scott did not reply to my emails and phone calls concerning the action stage. However, I ultimately met Heather to discuss the way forward and carry out an interview for my action research. The Team had carried out an evaluation of the

conference and highlighted areas for development such as improving

communication and greater opportunity for involvement in decision-making.

This decision was a product of my presentation and of other activities at the

Team Day. So a new communications strategy has been developed which

incorporates consultation up through the Team as well as information down

from the top. They intend to revisit the learning organisation questionnaire in

two years time and as an objective the creation of the learning organisation is

still in the forefront of Heather's mind.

Interviews for the action research

In all with BSET I conducted four interviews for the action research: two after

the Choices stage, one with Lesley Hepworth (Senior Adviser in the Team)

and one with Heather Scott. Then there were two after the Report stage, one

with Heather and one joint one with Will Andrews and Dorothy Smith, also

Senior Advisers at the Team. These interviews were difficult to arrange due to

the considerable pressure being experienced by the senior managers at BSET

during the period of the research. Of the two at the post-Report stage one

occurred after normal working hours (i.e. at 7 p.m.) and one very early in the

morning before the pressures of the day had built up.

Similarities and differences in the two case studies

The two stories above give a brief impression of a series of complex

interactions which took place between myself and the clients over the period

of the action research. In the analysis section (Chapter 5) we will be

discussing the findings with relation to the two case studies. Prior to that it is

useful to draw out the similarities and differences between the two cases.

Each of these two cases has provided a rich fund of experience which has tested the capacity of the model for use in different contexts. Each has provoked interesting responses and valuable insights into how consultancy should be carried out and what is the value of a model such as YOME in building effective working relationships in order to evaluate management development.

The two cases share some features in common. Firstly the two organisations are of similar size. ACE, with 94 employees compares well in this respect with BSET also with 94. Both were, therefore, small enough to work with easily. For example it was not unmanageable to communicate with everyone by post or face to face but they were not so small that there wouldn't be interesting communication issues to discuss as part of the work. In searching for suitable cases, I could not have been more fortunate in this respect. My earlier possibility of working with City of York Council would have been much less manageable in this regard as it is a much larger organisation. Had a smaller organisation been chosen it is likely that there would have been fewer issues of interest to explore. Having two cases of approximately the same number of employees has, therefore, meant that comparisons can more easily be made between them. YOME is intended for use with any size of organisation so, while there need be no reason why having two organisations of the same size would invalidate the model, using it in organisations of varying sizes will be needed in the future before wider claims as to its generalisability can be made.

The two organisations were rather different in structure. Although the BSET is a discrete entity in itself with a definite and growing separate identity, it is still part of the Local Education Authority as a whole and in turn, the LEA is part of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council as a whole. This has implications for a

very wide range of issues which were discussed in the course of the action research, for example, the speed of decision-making in a slow-moving public bureaucracy was a frequent frustration. Whilst the Team was seeking to develop itself as a learning organisation, the complexity of its external environment was an element which had to be understood and managed. There is less freedom in BSET to make decisions and implement them within chosen timeframes than there is at ACE. Another aspect of being part of that wider organisation is that the Team needed to ensure that its work was compatible with that of other parts of the LEA and the Borough Council. Inevitably a local authority comes into contact with its citizens in a multitude of ways and activities need to be co-ordinated. In the ideal learning organisation, knowledge of changes elsewhere which affect the Team would be available at the press of a button and the boundary spanners would be feeding in that knowledge to the participative policy-making process (Pedler et al 1997 p. 136). Given the complexity and dynamism of a local authority and its external environment there will often be times when that process works less than effectively. At BSET the building of a learning organisation is far from being something over which they have complete control. At ACE, on the other hand, the organisation is reasonably discrete. It consists of those 94 workers in a limited company with its own identity and with a Board of Directors with considerable control over its activities. Of course, it works in a competitive environment where the views of key stakeholders such as customers, suppliers and competitors must be known and taken into account. However, within that knowledge it is relatively free to act as it sees fit. This difference gave me the opportunity to try out YOME with organisations which were significantly different in this respect. No detrimental effect was found from this. The learning organisation model recognises the importance of understanding external forces which have an impact on the organisation (Pedler et al p. 136).

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These forces may be part of the wider organisation or maybe outside completely. Either way they need to be taken into account.

A second difference between the two cases relates to the internal structure of these two similarly-sized entities. BSET is geographically very tightly located in the Barnsley Metropolitan District, working with schools in that area alone. Whilst it has stakeholders outside of that immediate District (particularly in the South Yorkshire area), its main activities occur there and everyone is based there. This gives it a very clear focus and a deep understanding of the demographic, political and social needs in their work and a clear target group of clients with whom to work. It makes communication easier in the sense that physical contact is frequent and most staff are based in only two buildings. At ACE there is a regional structure with the Doncaster Head Office being the hub of the operation and also the major operational depot but with 6 regional depots dispersed from Scotland to Cornwall. A commitment to empowerment of staff at regional level means that those depots are reasonably self-sufficient but with a responsibility to report to Head Office on their operations on a regular basis. Communication with the Eastern regional depot based at Doncaster is inevitably better than that with, for example, the South West, and this was an issue in the study which related to the need to maintain close contact between the Directors and the employees on the factory floor (a connection which had loosened with the growth and regionalisation of the Company). As YOME enables clients to explore communication in the organisation if they choose to do so, the differences in communication caused by different geographical arrangements can form part of the study.

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two organisations is that one is public and one privately owned. The implications of this for their

operation are enormous and I have looked for ways in which it is significant for the research. In fact it seems less important than one might expect. Obviously, decisions made at BSET take place in a more highly politicised context and the whole planning process must take account of the Government's targets for school improvement and raising standards but the way in which those objectives are reached varies from one advisory team to another. As a result, the internal management development approaches of the Team are their affair. As at ACE, they had committed themselves to developing as a learning organisation and were taking action internally and independently of political forces to achieve this objective. At ACE the Board is in control of the Company and develops policy as it sees fit. It is independent of political control as long as it abides with the law. So, in many ways, this difference is small in terms of the research. In drawing up the YOME I anticipated the business language used may be unfamiliar in the public sector organisations with whom I might work. For this reason I included a 'Best Value' study as an option in order to make it more relevant in public sector contexts. This is a system where public services are encouraged to challenge thinking about a particular service, compare it with other organisations doing similar work, consult service users and key stakeholders about quality and set up competition in order to find the best provider of the service. Interestingly, however, BSET chose to explore the learning organisation concept rather than Best Value and this led me to believe that this model was relevant across the public/private ownership divide.

A further issue which could potentially have an effect on the research is the need to satisfy external inspectors of the organisation's work. BSET was in the early stages of responding to a somewhat negative OFSTED inspection when I began working with them and were revisited by an OFSTED team towards

the end of the process. The need to demonstrate fundamental improvements in managerial approach was in the forefront of the minds of the Management Team and, indeed, the study we carried out together was used as evidence of changing approaches to running the organisation. This is a major external challenge to BSET which both forced their hand and presented them with stressful demands just at the time of our study. They had no choice but to submit to this inspection and found it both time-consuming and problematic in that the Team felt that there was insufficient recognition of the substantial changes that had been made between the two visits. In some ways it was a distraction from the process of improvement of which our study formed a part. At ACE, on the other hand, there was no requirement to answer in this way to an outside inspectors. They are subject to the usual health and safety checks and legal requirements but have no requirement to justify their very existence in this way. They did choose to be reassessed for the Investors in People Award and were successful in doing this. This is very relevant to some aspects of the learning organisation and has an important effect on the morale of staff and on external perception of the company. It involves a bureaucratic process of self-assessment and a visit from an assessor (not unlike the OFSTED process in some ways) but the key difference is that it is entered into voluntarily. Again, ACE used our study as evidence for the IiP re-assessment (which was successful). With a choice-based model such as YOME, the client can use the findings of the completed study as evidence of reflection and development. Having choices means that only the matters which may be high on the inspectors' agenda may be chosen but as the consultant I cannot be completely responsible for how the findings are used within the organisation.

One contextual similarity in the two cases is that on both occasions I was working with women product champions in the organisations. There was no

conscious effort to find organisations with women at their head and I would have been equally comfortable working with men but there may be some significance to the way in which the working relationship developed over the course of the action research. It could also be that as a woman consultant I was more favourably received by these two women than I might have been by male managers in a similar context. Having said this, I have since had a lot of interest shown in the model from men as well and they see no obstacle as a result of my gender. The positions of Sue Drohan as the only woman on the Board and of Heather Scott as an assertive and highly professional 'expert' in a predominantly female management team are certainly relevant to the way the research developed. Their seniority in the organisations gave them great credibility but their styles of management were also very participative and they sought to draw on my expertise in a very respectful way.

One common theme in both pieces of work is that both organisations were facing extremely challenging business environments which made introspection feel something of a luxury and yet forced re-thinking for the future just to survive. ACE has, over the last two to three years, faced major new competitors and has needed to diversify and multi-skill its workforce to survive. It has been forced to develop its Shaping the Future Project to cope with these new demands and this study was part of that process. Whilst it seemed to some members of the Board to be a luxury and something detached from the hard-edged business decisions they were facing, there was finally a realisation that the long-term, a people-oriented perspective was essential to their survival. At BSET, the external pressure as a result of the negative OFSTED inspection had forced major changes in staffing, structure, operations and culture. There was really very little time for research on how they were doing and yet it was needed in order to keep developing organisationally and

demonstrate to OFSTED that changes were being made. As YOME is essentially based on carrying out a study to evaluate where the organisation lies in terms of its development, it can provide an opportunity and an impetus for reflection which is often absent.

A further difference between the two cases was in the sheer pace of work being carried out. This had major implications for the action research. Staff at ACE were busy and involved with actively running the company and coping with many problems and difficulties on a daily basis. This was as nothing, however, compared with the pace of work being handled by the Management Team at BSET. Their diaries were completely full at all times (making it difficult even to make appointments to take the work forward). They attended evening meetings (mostly in schools) several times per week in addition to their normal daily workloads and they rarely had any chance to stop and reflect on the long term. Despite their obvious commitment to the action research and to the study I was doing with them, meetings had to be squeezed in between the many other demands on their time. E-mails and phone calls were not returned and at times it was very difficult to make progress. This was a major contrast with ACE. The YOME does take a certain amount of time and commitment to complete and I am sure that its impact on ACE has been greater than at BSET simply because there was more time for reflection and dissemination of the findings.

Finally, perhaps the most significant difference as related to this work is that BSET was a very newly established organisation where the boundaries, organisation chart, culture and, indeed management development, were still in the process of being formed. ACE, by contrast, is a long-established company with a regional structure which has been in place for a number of years and a

continuity of leadership at Board level. YOME was originally intended to be used when an organisation had completed a management development programme and in the strictest sense this had not yet happened at BSET. Nevertheless, YOME was sufficiently flexible to be of value there as well as at ACE where the organisation had been established for longer and there had been a management development programme.

Conclusion

So, there are both parallels and differences in these two cases. This can only enrich the research and help tease out the complexities of the interaction between the consultant and the client. The parallels and differences in the two studies, in the consultancy process itself and in the action research are rich and fascinating. In the next chapter I will go on to explore these more fully and draw out their meaning for the development of the YOME.

CHAPTER 5 - FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter should be read in conjunction with Chapter 4 which outlines the two cases and their major similarities and differences. Here the analysis is taken forward by drawing out what was discovered in the two cases in relation to the research questions. Each research question is taken in turn and the findings from both cases are discussed systematically. These research questions are discussed in the introduction and the material in the literature review is organised around them. Thus, by the end of this chapter, the reader should be able to see the connections between the themes already present in the secondary sources which were then made the focus of the present action research study.

The first research question concerns what the client organisations were doing to evaluate the impact of management development programmes on their organisations before I approached them to do this work. It is intended to explore what these organisations would have done had I not intervened. It is meant, therefore, to clear the ground for our work together and put these findings in the context of what may have taken place had this research not been undertaken.

The second research question concerns the impact of the introduction of the learning organisation concept on my approach to evaluation with these clients. This research is intended to discover whether the learning organisation concept is a useful one in evaluation. The literature demonstrates the difficulty and complexity of evaluating the impact of management development on organisations. Even so, the learning organisation concept seems to offer a

useful vehicle for learning about organisational change of this kind. It is, therefore, important to discuss its impact in these two cases.

The third question addressed in the literature review concerned whether is it best if the organisations undertake such evaluation for themselves rather than it being carried out by a consultant or other agency. For the purposes of these findings, I have subdivided this question into two. Firstly, what insights did the exercise give on the consultancy process? This section explores the experiences of working with the two clients in a consultancy capacity and applying some of the insights from the literature to my approaches to consultancy. Secondly, how did the Yates Options Model for Evaluation (YOME) work in the two case study settings? From these two sub-questions and from a comparison with research question 1 it is possible to draw some conclusions about the value of a consultant coming to assist an organisation in exploring these issues.

The emphasis, inevitably, in this chapter is on what has been learned from these two cases about the answers to these questions. The findings chapter cannot depart from the results which were discovered in the action research itself. It will not, therefore, discuss wider issues or speculate on the answers which other research on the subject may have provided. It is essentially grounded in the data and absolutely arises from the discoveries made in the close collaborations carried out with the two client organisations. Moreover, action research is, essentially, context-based. As each research question is considered, however, there will be discussion about the validity of those findings as well as their potential generalisability.

Throughout this chapter I will be referring to the original data collected in interviews, meetings, events etc. Each of these interactions has a unique record number which is listed in Appendix Two. The first letter of that unique record number refers to the case: A for ACE and B for BSET. There are three kinds of interactions: meetings which took place for the consultancy work; survey questionnaires which were completed for the consultancy work and; interviews which were carried out for the purposes of the action research. The meetings are recorded as Records of Interaction (ROIs) and are numbered sequentially. The questionnaire distribution and analysis for the consultancy work is referred to by the letter (Q). The interviews which took place for the purpose of the action research are recorded with the initial of the name of the interview respondent. The appropriate record number is recorded in brackets after the point made in the text.

What were the clients doing already to evaluate their management development?

The present research does not assume that my intervention was the first attempt made by organisations to address this issue. It recognises that most organisations with a genuine commitment to employee and organisational development will be thinking about the effectiveness of their efforts in this direction. The value of doing so is widely known (Goldstein 1986, Megginson et al 1999, Easterby-Smith 1994). Given what these and others state about such issues, it would not be surprising to find that the clients had carried out immediate post-course evaluations of their management training efforts with a view to discovering the individual participants' views of how much they enjoyed the programme and how useful they felt it to be (Smith 1993).

However, as Easterby-Smith (1985) points out this may serve no more than a ritual function. They might also have assessed the learning which had taken place in accordance with Kirkpatrick's 'Learning' level (1975) and even considered changes in behaviour in the work place in line with Kirkpatrick's 'Behaviour' level. Any attempts to evaluate the impact of management development on organisations could be expected to focus on concrete results and changes in financial figures but without being sure that these were caused by the management development activity.

In the course of the present research there was an attempt to discover what the clients would have done to evaluate their management development had I not come along to help them. What were their plans for evaluation of their progress? How did they know that their approaches would develop the staff and the organisation in the manner required? So, questions were asked throughout the exercise about what was being done and what would have been done had I not appeared on the scene. As a logical extension of that, there is the issue of why they made the choice to go with YOME rather than continue with what they were already doing. This raises a number of significant political issues for each organisation which will be explored in the final part of this section.

What management development were the client organisations doing and how were they evaluating it?

Before I came to work with them, members of staff in both client organisations were working towards a variety of qualifications and awards and were following training and development programmes. In addition both organisations, but particularly ACE, were embarked on systematic

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programmes of organisational development which, in turn, contributed to the personal development of staff. This section looks at those efforts and considers the ways in which the organisations were evaluating them.

The Shaping the Future Sharing Success programme at ACE had made line managers responsible for the training and development of their staff and had aimed their development efforts at everyone in the company. At the same time it was made clear that development for the future was in everyone's interest and would contribute to the survival and success of the Company. The stated aim of that investment was the creation of a learning organisation which would lead them to become a 'World Class Manufacturing Company' (ACE Evaluation of Investment in Training and Development of Employees 1999-2000). There had been many opportunities for managers to enhance their personal development and many of them had responded positively to that. This was discussed at the meeting of the Board of Directors of 1st February 2000 which summarised the evaluation of the employee development programme. It was stated there that

> The Board felt that managers were still coming to terms with the wide scope the empowerment culture was encouraging, but in broad terms most managers had responded very positively. Some, however, were still uncomfortable with the concept that the senior management were no longer delivering dictated inputs and were cultivating the managers' own abilities to clarify their own required outcomes with their own teams in order to achieve plans which they had been involved in developing.

> Minutes of the ACE Board of Directors meeting of 1st February 2000

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From this statement, one might reasonably assume that the Board had been presented with evidence of a systematic evaluation of the management development programme. It represents a positive picture but it may or may not be an accurate one. How had they arrived at such a view? Board members had been presented with a training costs analysis and a breakdown for the qualifications achieved. This showed that health and safety had been a high priority and that IT training had been delivered. Selected managers had been put through a 12 day management development programme linked to Management Charter Initiative standards and to NVQ Management Level 4. The participants in that programme had completed post-course evaluation sheets which were generally positive. The criticisms that were expressed by the first group were used to improve the second cohort. This reflected the typical approach which the literature suggests many organisations adopt which is to evaluate individual responses to training and development on the basis that if the participants enjoyed them then that is a good indicator that they were good programmes (Brown 1980, Rosti and Shipper 1998).

Following the training, participants had gone on to develop Key Performance Indicators by which to measure their own achievements and those of their teams. The information gathered in connection with the Key Performance Indicators was reported on a quarterly basis by each region in its balanced scorecard documentation and at the point of completing the study that system was well-established and operating with varying degrees of effectiveness in all regions. All information gathered through these processes had been submitted for the Company's Investors in People accreditation and this documentation had been accepted as part of a successful process both initially in January 1995 and at reassessment in January 2000.

In addition to the company programme, a number of individuals at managerial level had been studying on their own initiative for Masters level qualifications e.g. a degree in management at York and an MSc in Change Management at Sheffield. The Board of Directors have a clear commitment to staff development and an openness to learning from elsewhere illustrated by their interactions with universities and with the local chamber of commerce seminars. The Company is involved in an In Company Teaching Scheme for product development and they have two MSc International Marketing students from Sheffield Hallam University working on consultancy projects with at the Doncaster site.

The Director of HR emphasises the importance of evaluation and the annual report to the Board on investment in training and development is testimony to that. Her evaluation (ACE Evaluation of Investment in Training and Development of Employees 1999-2000) concentrates on the views of individual participants and the hard impact on the 'bottom line' results in the regions. As with any evaluation of the latter, it is difficult, if not impossible, to be sure that staff training and development has been instrumental in improving financial performance. Connections are made but there can be no certainty. This approach to evaluation is largely in line with Campbell's approaches (1995) which emphasise return on investment, cost-benefit ratio and bottom line evaluation.

Nevertheless managers reported in CPD and appraisal documentation that they were more aware of the need for certain behaviours and of the need to monitor the performance of their workers before and after training to ensure that new skills were implemented (AROI1). Success in the achievement of

National Vocational Qualifications at all levels was also seen as having a positive impact on employee performance (Investors in People Post Recognition Review). Not everyone found such opportunities comfortable, however. Whilst the Company hadn't forced anyone to complete qualifications some people did find the whole change process and the requirement on them to continue learning rather threatening (AROI1). Two people even left the Company because they didn't feel they could accommodate the new challenge. There was a risk associated with personal development for some staff. Those who had embarked on a course of learning and had achieved some kind of recognised standard were impatient to move and obtain promotion. They left gaps behind them which other people were not able or prepared to fill (AROI2). Some staff at operative level had no desire to take up promotion opportunities and saw their work as an instrument to make a living so that they could devote their energy to other interests (AROI2). There was also a strong realisation that this kind of development work takes a lot of time and deeply changes the culture. Sometimes people objected to the fact that it took them off other projects which might make a more immediate impact on orders and delivery times (AQ1). When competition is tough, there is an impatience which leads to suspicion of long term initiatives like these. My interviewees described the Shaping the Future project as a large, ambitious programme which took time to develop and set up some suspicion as well as enthusiasm (AROI4).

Another aspect of ACE's evaluation of their development comes through the Company's benchmarking efforts. The Directors and Managers had measured themselves against the widely-known Business Excellence model and found that the reflection they had done at that stage led to better approaches to managing the company. The matrix of evidence produced for the self-

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assessment they completed revealed a number of weaknesses (ACE Conveyor Equipment Ltd Versus UK Excellence) which they decided to address through the 'Shaping the Future' project.

A further piece in the evaluation jig-saw was the record-keeping they did anyway e.g. staff retention figures, monitoring reasons for people leaving, actual working hours, sickness and absence data and comparative data across regions in terms of staff Key Performance Indicators. There is a lot of subjective assessment by managers through day-to-day performance in the teams they lead. Indeed, Sue Drohan was firmly of the belief that it is easier to quantify success in terms of the team or department than at individual or company level (AROI2).

This was the position the Company was in when I approached them in early 2000. At that point Sue Drohan was considering a renewal of the management development programme and offering an accredited programme for a qualification rather than simply internal staff development (AROI1).

It is vital to see these efforts in the wider context. They were spearheaded by Sue Drohan who had been a primary head teacher. She valued and was committed to learning in organisations and had herself studied on the Industrial Society Management Development programme. She had also completed her NVQ Level 5 in Management with mentoring advice from a consultant. Rob Drohan had invited her to co-ordinate the Investor in People submission and so she had facilitated the Company to develop appraisal, personal development planning and a programme of training and development. She had also instigated team briefings, an improved

communications policy and a biennial employee survey, the latter designed to try to establish staff views on key issues.

Sue's importance in this process should not be underestimated. The interviews and questionnaires for the consultancy study (AROI4 and AQ1) demonstrate the shared view that her long involvement with the company, as a member of the founding family gave her a tremendous credibility and legitimacy with the staff. Her interpersonal skills, respect for individuals in the company and ability to mediate conflict meant that she was trusted to take these initiatives forward. It is perhaps a sign of her leadership that initial mistrust of the planned development of the Company changed to higher levels of commitment. Sue took it is a healthy sign that two to three years ago people had wanted to complete the employee survey anonymously whereas now many wanted to put their name and departments on the form (AROI).

In Dawson's (1995) terms Sue at ACE is a Policy Achiever who is working to ensure that development is in line with organisational objectives (AROI4 and AQ1). The fact that the organisation is small and Sue is it's HR Director contributes to her power to achieve this but the important thing is that in Dawson's typology, Sue is well-placed to make development effective and to be a champion for an evaluation model which has overall business objectives in mind. Prior to starting the primary research for this dissertation, Dawson's work led me to think that my model required a Policy Achiever to be in place and at ACE Sue performed that role.

From the above it is clear that the Company is using much of the prevailing thinking about good business practice to inform their strategy for evaluation and development. Had I not come along at that point and proposed that we

use the Yates Options Model for Evaluation, the company would have continued to refine and develop their training and development programme in the light of all the evidence already available to them. They had a very clear commitment to change and improvement and were aware of the need to constantly monitor the impact of their development initiatives on staff performance. (AROI1; AROI2).

At BSET, the picture on what was being done to evaluate management development was much less developed. The organisation in its contemporary form had been in existence for only six months and the new Chief Adviser (Heather Scott) had been there even less time. In a sense, the management development merely comprised trying to get the Team to gel together and become more effective. There really had been a tremendous amount of learning just from doing the job (BROI2).

There was a lot of informal mentoring, especially for those new to the Team and expertise was being shared from people who had brought in experiences and knowledge from other authorities and roles. Some members of the Advisory Team had undertaken management development in a variety of forms. The Chief Adviser had a Masters in Education Management. Another had completed business management and business planning courses organised by Business in the Arts (BROI1).

Some of the Team spend their time delivering training and development to teachers so they were very knowledgeable about many aspects of management. All of the advisory team had attended the Sheffield Business School workshops on the Business Environment and Knowledge Management

which had been set up for head teachers and aspiring heads in the Barnsley area.

In a sense, what the Team had been doing was looking outward to schools (which is, of course, their role) and over their shoulders to OFSTED. They were, however, aware of their need to consider themselves as a Team and indeed had started the process of building the Team through training, through an annual all-staff conference and other initiatives.

BSET have considered making an application for the Investors in People award. If the ACE experience is anything to go by this will force some careful thinking and the routinisation of developmental activities. Heather Scott is already an IiP adviser so there is expertise available in the organisation which could be harnessed to that end.

BSET's organisational position as part of the local education authority also means that they had had to complete a Best Value review and were now in the process of producing a Service Plan. In preparation for this they had carried out a SWOT analysis as part of the business planning process. There seemed, however, to be a sense in which these were externally imposed requirements which came as a product of being part of the wider local authority structure rather than being an integral part of what they were trying to achieve as an organisation. The development of people to achieve these reviews and planning processes seemed to be absent. The staff were assumed to be professional enough to cope with those demands rather than being seen as needing development to meet them.

All new advisers experience induction training at a regional level. This is a two day course which includes some management skills. This seems not to have been evaluated in terms of its effectiveness for the Team (although the providers carried out their own post-training questionnaires). The view was expressed by the senior management team that the senior advisers group was in need of management development (BROI2). The Team were beginning (at the end of the first year of their existence) to share ideas and practice in sub-teams. However, they did not have total shared understanding of what that should involve and there was a recognition of a need for further development (BROI2).

If I hadn't come along, I do not think BSET would have considered an evaluation of their management development. They were busy getting on with the job and improving their reputation with key stakeholders, especially local schools and OFSTED. The senior management was keen to be seen to be actively working towards a more proactive culture and their personal diaries reflected that. In a sense the amount of activity of the senior advisers meant that they had little time to devote to the longer term issues of management development. This became clear in one meeting when a more junior member of staff was present (for a later agenda item) and he described the senior management team as too busy to be reflective. He didn't perceive them as a team developing strategy. He said that 'the hymn sheet was not complete so presumably they can't all sing from it' (BROI2). There was a lot of discussion in that meeting about whether the staff were ready for a more participative style of management. Perhaps what it illustrated to me was that there wasn't a shared understanding of what management should be like and so the senior management team couldn't agree on the way forward.

So, the evaluation of management development at BSET was largely non-existent. They were beginning to recognise, however, that they needed to turn inward and consider their own approaches.

Comparing ACE and BSET, it is clear that the relative newness of BSET as an organisation and the dominance of a professional group with an educational background meant that there had been little systematic management development at all. Such management development that had taken place had been individual, ad hoc and had often occurred in other organisations. The personal development many staff had had was focused on developing professional skills through INSET training rather than management skills. At ACE, by contrast, there had been a systematic attempt to develop the management staff together and through a Company-wide approach. The fact that it is a long-established company with continuity of management and a family firm atmosphere had allowed a coherent approach to be followed. At BSET this was being developed but new leadership and a new structure meant that everyone was spending time pulling together as a team rather than considering personal development as a means towards organisational change.

Management development or organisational development?

From the above discussion it may already be clear that at ACE management development as the personal growth of individual members of staff became inextricably interwoven with the development of the organisations itself. In making an investment in ACE staff through training and development programmes of various kinds, the Company was doing so in order to take the

organisation forward. There is never an entirely altruistic motive in this. The purpose is to change the organisation by changing the individuals.

There can be a wide range of business-orientated motives for developing managers. At ACE part of the reason this was needed was to cope with the growth of the company and the development of its regional structure. It had become necessary for managers in the regions to be more autonomous. No longer could the M.D. watch over their every move. At BSET there was beginning to be some understanding that although the organisation was new, it was beginning to grow into the position where managers could participate in plans for change rather than to continue to be led very directly from the top. The need for management development was becoming clear.

When it came to the evaluation process, it was equally difficult to separate the two. This is well illustrated by responses to the initial question in some of the telephone interviews in both organisations. When I asked 'If I hadn't proposed the evaluation we are now working on, how would you have evaluated the way your managers are developing?', the responses were often made in the context of analysing the organisation as a whole: "There are lots of ways of evaluating where you are at - IiP, Charter Mark etc" (BH1) "We would have carried on drawing on good practice concepts like Business Excellence and IiP" (AS2).

So during our work together it very quickly became difficult for us to separate the management development from the organisational development. Perhaps this is the inevitable consequence of the model. When the clients chose to focus on the impact of management development on the organisation as a whole (Kirkpatrick's top level, 1975) they inevitably turned away from the

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individuals involved and started to look at the whole organisation. Despite the fact that I presented the model as a series of choices which definitely included looking at individual development, both organisations made the choice to focus at organisational level and quickly forgot that it could have been to do with individual development. One respondent said three months after the research was done that "it wasn't about their job or how well they did it: it was about their perceptions of the organisation" (BA/D1). So in a sense the studies in the organisations came to be about whatever those involved wanted them to be about. To an extent my wishes may have steered them in this direction but it was very clear that this was where they wanted to focus their attention. I will return to this in later sections of the findings.

A further aspect to this is that both organisations see evaluation as an integral part of training and development. Both were completely comfortable with the idea that genuine evaluation leads to improvement and should not be threatening. As a result they saw this project as an extension of this principle. They were open to feedback on how they were doing and wanted to question their approaches. So evaluation of organisation development is simply all part of the process of training people so that you improve the organisation.

As the Action Research progressed, therefore, I started to wonder whether the model could stand as a tool for the evaluation of the general state of management in an organisation even where there had been no explicit management development at all. Indeed one could argue that at BSET that is exactly the position they were in. There had been no management development programme as such and yet the model seemed to apply just as well there as at ACE where there had been a training programme specifically designed to develop their managers. It was becoming very clear through the

action research that the model could have wider implications than I had at first thought.

Timing Issues

When I approached these organisations they were each at different stages in terms of their development. They each had an agenda for change. I wanted to discover whether there would be an appropriate time at which to approach an organisation to apply the model. At first I assumed that, as with most evaluation, the logical time would be following a management development programme. I had years of experience of post-course evaluation and the literature suggested that evaluation usually occurred at that point (Brown, 1980; Rosti and Shipper 1998; Easterby-Smith 1985). However, in the interest of gaining access and in the spirit of open-mindedness I carried on working with BSET even though they had not put their managers through a structured programme of development.

My approach to the organisations prompted some evaluation to happen which might not otherwise have occurred. At BSET the senior advisers were so busy that stopping to consider how good they were at management seemed almost a self-indulgence. The intervention of an outsider led to action.

> Your arrival was fortuitous because it made space for it to be done. That's the biggest problem. Somebody external coming in to do it creates that space and gives us commitment.(BS2)

The stage of development of the organisation at the point at which they take the evaluation on is also a factor in what happens in their use of the model. At

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BSET they felt it was appropriate to start with an assessment of the extent to which they displayed the characteristics of a learning organisation. Had they been more established they may have made very different choices. "Because of where we are we have tackled it from the angle we have" (BS1). One respondent thought it might even be appropriate to come in at the Results Stage of YOME if the organisation was more established (BH1). This, however, seemed to show a low level of understanding of the staged process I was presenting. This taught me further lessons about how I present the model which are discussed below.

Another respondent at BSET said

We would have undertaken some action research in the future either by ourselves or by commissioning someone to do it. It probably would have been in a couple of years – at the end stage rather than at this point where we are just embarking on the creation of the learning organisation. We feel we're at the agenda-setting stage now and we probably would have done it later. (BA/D1)

I would argue that experience with ACE suggests that whatever stage you evaluate yourself against a model such as that of the learning organisation you will find areas for improvement. Having said this, at BSET, the fact that the organisation was new did not preclude using the model. The timing was perceived as appropriate.

Timing-wise it was appropriate to go for the learning organisation because we were thinking about whether the organisation was shaping up. It was still very new and needed to be in as a whole organisation. (BS2)

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When commencing the process with ACE, the fact that they were well-established and very active in applying business models to their organisation made me think that possibly the timing was inappropriate. I made a reflective note in my diary after the first meeting that

> maybe with a company this far down the line with developing the learning organisation the model works only as a starting point. I can see that I am now going to have to formulate some new options for them and the design of the research tool will have to be more sophisticated than I had anticipated. (AROI1)

I felt that they may have already been applying business models so much that they would not value my approach. Sue disabused me of that and felt that it would be useful. In fact, further options emerged naturally from our discussion and didn't need to be built in at all. The choices that were included in the Model were used as a springboard for discussion about what needed to be considered at that particular point in time.

One of the timing issues which was vital at ACE was that their attempts at management development had recently made the managers there quite introspective and fault-finding. Sue was concerned about the impact of this on motivation. The use of the choice based model meant that those concerns prevalent just at that particular moment could form part of the study.

A further example of how timing can affect how the model is used is that ACE was currently facing very challenging markets. Whilst this meant that introspection was not always valued, an argument could be made (and was

made – AROI3) that this is exactly the time to consider your management

approaches in order to cope with the changes being faced.

In general I learned from this that the model could be valuable at a number of

stages of an organisation's development – a valuable lesson indeed.

Politics

In both organisations there were internal and external political reasons why

they would work with me to carry out an evaluation like this. In the case of

ACE, there was a need to give the Shaping the Future project a new fillip.

They had found that the development of managers across the company had

contributed to improvements in place but that the Company as a whole still

had inconsistencies in its approaches. For example, the Balanced Scorecard

(Kaplan and Norton 1992) was chosen as the model for checking on

performance against key targets but it was not universally applied (AS2).

A further important internal political factor at ACE was that my product

champion in the company was the only woman on the Board and she

sometimes had difficulty in getting human resource issues to be taken

seriously (AROI5). Sue saw the prospect of a piece of research by a university

academic as the rigorous stimulus she needed to get the people development

about which she is so passionate higher up the organisational agenda. She

was said to me

> ACE men are not very touchy-feely. They won't necessarily say what they
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> think to Rob even though Rob knows they've got views. He doesn't see the
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> need to give signals that he's listening. Having stuff in writing following our

survey really helps it to be take seriously. The action stage is particularly important in getting ownership in the company.

When I presented the findings of the research to the Board it became very clear to me that the other members saw this as a low priority and Sue was struggling to have it taken seriously. Whilst she was apologetic to me that it was seen in that way, I thought it was very interesting to see how difficult it was for her to have her voice heard. After the meeting we spent a long time together discussing how she might have been perceived and what she could do to have the work considered again at that level (AROI5). Ultimately, the findings of the study were picked up and used but it took a determined effort on her part following the Board of Directors meeting for her to overcome her frustration and come back with an unemotional, professional rationale as to why the results should be widely circulated and given credence across the Company. Sue later realised that the upset at the Board meeting may have had a cathartic effect (AROI6). Her reaction to it via a discussion with me had a very positive effect on the way HR issues were later received in the Company. Her assertive attempt immediately after the meeting to get the study results back on the agenda was successful and led to a number of concrete changes in policy and practice. What is more, it seemed to break a pattern in her professional relationship with her husband and he began to listen to her viewpoint more carefully and to recognise her expertise in perceiving important but softer issues and behaviours (AROI6; AS3).

From the point of view of the future use of the model, personality and power issues need to be addressed at the beginning. The position of the product champion in the organisation and their power to involve others is essential.

The product champion also needs to be aware of that role and accept it fully. The literature on consultancy is quiet on this point.

At BSET, my product champion was also a woman. It may be that I subconsciously worked better with women. The difference between ACE and BSET was that in the latter case my collaborator was the head of the Team. As Chief Adviser, Heather Scott had both positional and expert power and could push for the research to take place. She was very good at involving others, particularly on the Management Team and took it upon herself to sell the concept of the study with the rest of the Team. It was entirely in line with her philosophy of the way the organisation should be managed that she wanted to involve as many people as possible in these kinds of internal management issues. In Dawson's typology I would describe her as a Pilot Strategist who is politically aware and can see the implications of impending organisational changes and uses evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness to external forces (Dawson 1995).

A further aspect of this internal politics is that everyone involved needs to understand how a study like this fits in with other work that is being completed. When we were discussing and planning the approach at BSET this was felt to be important for gaining widespread acceptance of the value of the work. The senior management team at BSET had committed themselves to the learning organisation concept and needed to know how they were shaping up against that model but also they needed to raise awareness and understanding of what a learning organisation is before they could go about developing it. Similarly at ACE, everyone, from the Board down, needed to see the connections between this and the Shaping the Future project.

At an external level, too, the evaluation looked good for BSET. They were having a re-inspection and were able to use that as evidence for their attempts to resolve internal management problems and lead the organisation forward.

The discussion above relates to the first research question 'what management development were the client organisations doing and how were they evaluating it?' It addresses the way the organisations responded to my request to make the evaluation using YOME. In summary, the findings relating to the first research question are that in both client organisations, personal and organisational development was going on with one affecting the other but without systematic attempts to connect them or to evaluate the impact on the organisation. The Model applied equally well whatever stage of management and organisational development the two clients were at and seemed to be something which was valuable even where there hadn't been some form of systematic training. Similarly, the evaluation could be carried out at any time, irrespective of the stage of their development. Internal and external political pressures existed in both organisations to make an evaluation particularly valuable: the need to impress external inspectors at BSET and the need to raise the profile of staff development issues at ACE made the evaluation particularly apposite.

This completes the discussion with relation to the first research question. I will now proceed to the second.

What was the impact of the learning organisation concept on the process of evaluation with the clients?

Research question 2 focuses on the usefulness of the learning organisation concept and how it was received by the clients. The thesis sets out to discover whether the learning organisation concept is of any value in assessing the impact of management development on organisations. This research question begins to get to the heart of this. It cannot, however, be considered in isolation but must be read with the important issues of how the consultancy was done (which follows).

<u>Attractiveness of the concept</u>

The clearest and most obvious finding with relation to this research question is that the learning organisation concept was instantly attractive to both clients. At the initial meeting with ACE (AROI1), Sue had said that she wanted to look at how the company was doing at becoming a learning organisation. They had made building a learning organisation an objective with Shaping the Future and she felt that although she knew they hadn't achieved it yet it was something they could evaluate formatively as well as summatively. At the meeting where we planned the study, there was a clear view that the 'new economy' where technology and working patterns were changing so drastically, workers had to learn to become more adaptable and learn to develop and transfer their skills throughout their working lives. Everyone in the Company needed to recognise the importance of learning. The fact that the learning organisation was included had a very positive effect on their perception of YOME

When I saw the learning organisation in it I thought 'that's what we're doing! I want to know more about that. When you see the words learning organisation you think that it's about tailor-making your own systems and that takes time and money but it's also what ACE has always done. There was a link there. (AS1)

At BSET there was the same reaction from the start. The concept was instantly attractive. Heather felt that they needed to focus on themselves more. They needed to observe how people worked together and this would be a good vehicle for that (BS1). At the choices stage there was again an emphasis on the learning organisation (BROI2). They seemed keen to know more about the model almost to the point where we neglected everything on the other slides. Their interpretation was also fairly simple: they emphasised that it was about connecting the disparate parts of their organisation together.

To an extent the findings about the attractiveness of the learning organisation concept illustrate a mismatch of views between myself and the clients. To some extent the people I directly collaborated with and certainly the operatives and employees at one remove from the research process, saw the learning organisation as a much simpler concept than the literature suggests. The study at ACE demonstrated that 76% of respondents felt that they were part of a learning organisation but when asked to say what that meant they didn't feel able to express that (AQ1). They often referred to the fact that they were encouraged to go on courses and rarely mentioned the wider cultural aspects of the term. When asked why they thought it was (or was not) a learning organisation, 19% said they learned daily as part of doing the job, 22 % said they were always going on courses and 43% said there was encouragement for people to learn. This is a fairly limited interpretation of what the learning

organisation is. It did not include participative policy-making, enabling structure, formative accounting or most of the other elements which go to make up the learning organisation (Pedler et al 1997). Even Sue had a fairly limited sense of the concept as a paper she wrote in May 2000 illustrated ('Learning Organisation'). She saw it as about a four-stage process – 'Learn, Develop, Improve and Implement Change' and her analysis focused on the challenges in the market and the means to respond. Whilst these are very relevant they represent quite a limited conception of the term the learning organisation.

As part of the study I also circulated the jig-saw model of the learning organisation (reproduced in Appendix 5) to managers in the organisation and asked them to rate ACE against each piece in the model. This produced a very low response rate which could be interpreted as meaning either that they didn't understand it or didn't see it as worth replying to. Arguably, if ACE was a learning organisation there would have been a higher response! Expressing views in such surveys would then be a normal and regular feature of working life.

As we started to make the choices within the model, looking at the learning organisation was the very first decision that was made in the case of both clients. When I suggested at ACE that there were some downsides to the learning organisation concept (e.g. that there is a risk of losing a strategic focus; time-consuming personal development which may not be in line with company efforts) I was contradicted and told that there were no downsides it was just that people found it hard to change (AROI2).

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When I undertook the consultancy study at BSET and asked people to rate the organisation against the pieces on the jig-saw, some people felt that the language in the model was rather unfamiliar. They said it wasn't adapted to their world and that in education there was different language altogether. My perception is that the language of the model is universal but to be attractive at a deeper level than merely first impressions, it does need to be worded in meaningful ways. As at ACE there was a fairly low response rate (28%) but those who did reply recognised many strengths and some weaknesses with relation to the learning organisation model. After the choices stage, interview respondents said

> it was a vital part of it. We are the organisation we are and it's very easy to overlook learning. It's the first thing to go when budgets get cut because you're chasing the objectives of the organisation as a whole and it's very easy to forget the people. That's why is was vital that the learning organisation was there in your model. (BS1)

Even in retrospect, the respondents reiterated this view.

> It revealed people's true feelings about the learning organisation and where we are on it. If the learning organisation hadn't been in YOME it wouldn't have been used because the only organisation that really works is a learning organisation. It will never be ideal so it has to keep learning how to be better. (BS2)

The fact that both organisations were already committed (to some degree) to developing the learning organisation before I came on the scene made YOME more attractive. Indeed Heather said they would not have engaged with me in

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the work if the learning organisation part had not been there.

Speaking to Heather three months after the work was done she could not even remember what the other choices in the model were. She said the model worked because the learning organisation concept was inextricably intertwined with YOME (BS2).

The final point I would like to make in this section is that despite the attractiveness of the concept it is often something which drops to the bottom of the agenda because of its very long term nature. In the interview with Heather at the post results stage, she said

> The learning organisation idea is not in the forefront of people's minds because of their pace of work. They have 20 high priorities per day. It's still in the forefront of my philosophy for the organisation and when it's important I'll bring it to mind. It will come back easily.(BS2)

This finding in the case of BSET reflects their extremely busy schedules. At ACE there seems to be more time for attending to the longer term and reflecting on how to get to the point of sharing ideas and communicating the ethos. This is an important finding and could be a key difference between public and private sector evaluation of this kind, especially where the public organisation is heavily immersed in politics.

The literature suggests that there are some definite downsides to the learning organisation concept (Mintzberg et al 1998) but my findings here clearly refute that at least in the minds of my key respondents. Some of the participants in the studies did not find the terminology used in the jig-saw model very familiar

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or applicable to their world and others had a rather limited interpretation of the term but there was no objection to it as an objective.

All embracing nature

The learning organisation concept is entirely all-embracing in the sense that it covers all aspects of the business from awareness of the external environment through sharing learning to effective accounting and feedback on progress. (See Appendix 5) This made it very attractive as a means of checking the current overall state of the client organisations. In one fell swoop they could obtain staff views on everything from professional interaction with the outside world to the effectiveness of in-house technology.

What it also meant, however, was that different respondents meant different things by it and they were all correct. For example, at ACE Alan Trippier had a quite limited view of what the learning organisation meant. He emphasised the traditional working patterns in the North East and the reluctance of people to change their working patterns and attitudes. A manager in a learning organisation would see this diversity of viewpoints as a learning opportunity and encourage patterns of behaviour and working conditions to transfer from one region to another. He saw the failure of these employees to give up their traditions as an absence of learning and an illustration of their need to change.

However, the very all-embracing nature of the concept also has its downside in that there is a tendency to feel that it isn't achievable. Where do you start?

The learning organisation is such a big issue. When we started the Shaping the Future project we realised it had an impact on everything. It's enormous so the time factor will be a problem. (AROI3)

At BSET, there was a recognition that this is a very long term objective. It was something the Team would need to come back to at a later date. The Chief Adviser proposed to do the learning organisation jig-saw questionnaire again in two years by which time they hoped to see a lot of progress (BS2).

At BSET the Management team discussed the notion of the learning organisation being essentially about looking at the 'macro level and at everyone'. They said that as a management team they needed to understand the whole picture.

It even covers objective-setting in the first place so it becomes very complex. In YOME the 'What' stage is about agenda-setting for evaluation but agenda-setting is also part of the learning organisation so there are overlaps and activities within activities. (BROI2)

Evaluation tool or objective?

The clients did not have a view as to whether the learning organisation was a good tool for evaluation but they certainly saw it as an objective to be achieved. This is in line with the first school of thinking on the learning organisation which is described in the literature review. Both organisations had been attracted by the polemical and populist nature of much of the literature (Senge 1990; Pedlar, Burgoyne and Boydell 1997) which makes that writing

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all the more powerful for busy people who want to see clear objectives and the means to achieve them.

The fact that the clients saw the achievement of the learning organisation as an all-embracing goal was so powerful in their minds that it hardly mattered whether I saw it in a completely different way. Although I was thinking of it as a means to evaluate management development, they could see the advantage of using my aim to establish their position with relation to the learning organisation concept. The fact that both chose to get their staff's views on the jig-saw questionnaire was testimony to their enthusiasm for the concept and the relative unimportance of its nature as a tool for evaluation. The latter was subsumed into the overall objective.

In both organisations the studies showed that people had a rather limited understanding of the concept but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is not a good vehicle for evaluation. It's at the choices stage that it is valuable. This was illustrated at BSET where one member of the Management Team asked whether the jig-saw questionnaire (although it was in the 'How' phase) couldn't be used to help them clarify just what they needed to look at. This was a product of her thinking of the learning organisation as an objective rather than something to do with evaluation. She wondered whether it would be valuable to send out a 'quick and dirty' questionnaire to get a feel for the point they are at and then they could go from there to decide what they needed to focus on.

Process

In the process of becoming more au fait with the learning organisation idea as a whole, the participants increasingly saw it as worth pursuing. The very act of

conducting the studies led to a greater understanding of the concept and concrete action for change towards that goal. For example, Sue said three months after the completion of the study that

> The survey stimulated people to think that we need to do team briefings better especially about the learning organisation and what that means. We have just revised our communication strategy – we now have a standard agenda for team briefings every six weeks and that includes giving information about the company, ethos, culture and how what they're doing relates to that. It encourages everyone to think and talk about new ways of doing things. (AROl6)

In essence this vindicates the choice-based model because through the evaluation study the organisation is galvanised into change. Even talking about studying the learning organisation contributes to its development because the communication contributes to the change. Process is almost more important than the long term objective and the YOME seemed to be facilitating that process. It is not possible to show causal connections but the learning organisation is clearly a strong concept. It helps the organisation in inspirational, motivational terms. This means that the empirical result of a study like mine is not necessarily the outcome itself but that doing the study has had the effect of galvanising change through the exploration of concepts.

In a sense a process like this contributes to the development of the employees' sense of commitment to the organisation's aims. As Nonaka (1996) discussed, it heightens the employees' sense of identity with the enterprise and its mission.

In the literature review I anticipated that YOME would help organisations reframe their understanding and consider ways forward rather than put actual or numerical values on their progress towards their goal. As Smith and Tosey (1996) suggest accuracy is not of high importance; it is that the discussion galvanises effort and provides a means to monitor process. The study into progress towards a learning organisation is not there as an authoritative assessment of achievement; it is a stimulus to thinking.

Having said this, there is a need for the organisation to take on the findings and make use of them. At BSET, the political environment in which the Team were operating meant that they used the study findings as evidence to counter their critics rather than to take the organisation forward into new directions. This is perhaps due to Heather being in a Pilot Strategist role whereas Sue was in a Policy Achiever role.

This is not to say that ACE didn't use the study to obtain outside recognition as well. In their Investors in People assessment they recorded that the study had occurred and used quotes from the responses to the open questions in the survey to support the case they were making. Similarly in applying for a business award, Success Through People, they included details of the survey and spoke in glowing terms about it to the judges.

It comes back to the Russian doll idea discussed in the Introduction whereby the client studies sit within my action research into the effectiveness of YOME. What is essential is that we are keeping our respective purposes clear and sticking to them whilst recognising the mutual benefit of all of those multiple goals and means. Heather described it like this:

The model works to explore the detail of what the organisation already knows it wants. (BS2)

Essentially, these findings vindicate both the use learning organisation model and the choice of an action research focus. In the action research I am in reflective mode going back over the Russian dolls, checking my assumptions and becoming aware that the clients and I were seeing the learning organisation as something different from each other. This would not have been revealed had I simply launched YOME without this reflective research.

So essentially, this vindicates the model on three levels. Firstly, we all wanted to make use of the learning organisation concept and found it valuable. So my choice of starting point was vindicated. YOME is inevitably based on my conception of the learning organisation but I am now aware of very different interpretations of it. Secondly, the consultancy model gives the learning organisation as a choice and the clients chose to use it in ways which suited them; this does not invalidate the options Model as a whole. Their different definitions of the term and their preferred ways of working towards it as an objective are reflected in the choices they made within the consultancy tool; showing it to be flexible in use. Thirdly, the action research uncovered the first two findings so the action research is proving it to be a good methodology. These findings endorse both the methodology of the consultancy tool and of the research as a whole.

In summary, the findings for research question two are that the learning organisation concept is attractive to clients; it is all-embracing and broad-ranging and therefore flexible enough to use with a wide range of organisations at different stages of development. The clients saw the learning

organisation as an objective rather than a means of evaluation but our different conceptions did not prevent effective working but merely acted as the means of making choices. The clients also saw the whole process of evaluating progress towards the goal of becoming a learning organisation as valuable in itself because it stimulated reflection and communication.

I will now go on to look at the third research question which I have subdivided into two: 'what insights did the exercise give on the consultancy process' and 'how did YOME work in the two case study settings?'

What insights did the exercise give on the consultancy process?

This research question addresses the issue that in conducting action research like this, it is possible to reflect on the consultancy process and learn better ways of carrying out consultancy both for YOME and more generally. In so doing I intend to reflect on the literature and use the findings from the two cases to critique the literature. A further question this raises is whether any outsider is capable of judging the worth of a programme of management development or whether the organisation can better do this for itself. This goes to the heart of what the model is about because it is designed to help organisations evaluate their development with the assistance of the consultant rather than the consultant acting as a judge.

In both cases, of course, the clients had experienced working with consultants before. Rob Drohan at ACE had the view (which I believe to be widespread) that consultants should work in a manner which is tailor-made to the organisation. He didn't want a consultant who would charge him thousands of pounds to tell him what he already knew. He made it very clear that his

business is special to him and he wants a consultant to recognise that and help him to think about it in new ways (AROI3). As this was entirely in line with my own thinking I had no difficulty in setting out to act in that manner. Sue's view was that consultants were there to enable change, not to prescribe it. She sees herself as an internal consultant and had recognised in her own work the importance of enabling rather than requiring change (AROI1).

Facilitation skills

The experience of working with both clients brought home that facilitation skills are essential in a consultant. What a good consultant does is enable the organisation to do what it didn't know, or was only partially aware, it wanted to. As Sue put it

> The consultant facilitates the development of the company till it becomes an integral part of what they do. That is more sustainable. (AS2)

Facilitation (in my case) included planning the projects; setting up meetings; ensuring appropriate people were invited; asking about those people – their backgrounds, attitudes, roles; obtaining existing documentation (including working notes from other consultants); keeping discussions to the point; checking the choices were being made. This meant that between meetings I had to plan quite carefully what I would say, how I would encourage participants to share their views. Both clients showed their appreciation of my facilitation skills. ACE said

> What I've found useful is the clarity of thinking and explaining you did. That gave us the ability to see what's available and allow us to make

choices which suit our business.... Your inputs and timing were crucial (AT1)

Many thanks indeed for your support, encouragement and listening ear. The Yates model has proved to be very successful and the facilitator skills which you have demonstrated during the consultancy have been invaluable (AROl6)

There was enough dialogue to stimulate discussion – a lot of back and forth. We didn't interrupt each other but your ability was important to take on what was said and make us a bit more aware of important things e.g. 'you just said that was important – let's come back to that'.... You had the flexibility to facilitate dialogue and that enabled us to surface issues. That's what we want consultancy to be about. (BS1)

Whilst it is reassuring to receive this praise, the really interesting thing about these findings is that it was my facilitation skills that the clients valued above everything else including the content of the model. It was almost as if any model would have worked as long as it was well facilitated. This reflects Burdett's view (1994) that asking quality questions is the focal art of consultancy.

When asked what was the most important skill for the consultant to bring to the discussions both clients mentioned listening.

Ability to listen and interpret is vital all the way through. You were quite challenging. You know your business – the business of using the model, being a consultant and understanding the learning organisation.

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You offered examples that immediately rang true. You had your feet on the ground (BH1).

Consulting needs a range of higher order skills. You'd need a range of communication skills, facilitating, even counselling. Managing on the hoof. Not being fazed by anything that came up. The best self-evaluation models encourage honesty – it has to be carefully handled.(AS2)

BSET said that the face-to-face consultancy was the part of the process that they would definitely pay for if they were doing the work now for a fee. That was the part they didn't feel they could do themselves. Specifically, they believed that an external person could facilitate organisational change of this kind more objectively than a member of their own staff.

One was working with someone who was external to the organisation who was both objective and could work objectively with us.(BS2)

I think we need someone to ask challenging questions from the experience of doing the same thing with other organisations. We're influenced by our stake in the organisation so we need someone objective. People tend to be more open and honest with someone who is external.(BA/D1)

An important consideration in both cases was that the consultancy process had to fit around other activities in the company. We tried to make use of events, meetings, training etc, which would be happening anyway to conduct the research. In the case of BSET, the annual staff conference was the clear opportunity to disseminate the results of the study. At ACE we scheduled

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some of the interviews for the same time that respondents were visiting the Doncaster site for another purpose. At BSET in particular, the pace of the work was very much determined by the client. The Team was extremely busy. That combined with my own hectic schedule meant that there were long gaps in the process. These were not necessarily damaging (although it was impossible to know this for sure) but they do illustrate the point that facilitation has to take place at the pace of the client.

Participants often commented on the importance of good facilitation skills but the stage at which this was most important was in the 'what' phase discussions where the clients were familiarising themselves with the model and trying to establish just exactly what aspects they were really interested in pursuing further. Often ideas would arise in the discussion which were not included in the model so it would take some time for me to explain a piece of management theory to them and get their reaction to it. In a sense I would temporarily step into a teaching mode and then return to facilitation by seeking their response to that idea and asking if that was something they wanted to pursue.

Facilitation skill also includes ensuring that enough time is devoted to the work. Facilitating a large enough time slot to present the findings to the ACE Board proved beyond me. I will know better next time! A further important aspect of facilitating timing is that having a consultant come in forces them to do the work and do it within the time frame set by the work with the consultant. As one respondent at ACE said,

That type of thing isn't top priority. The longer the time you have to do it the less likely it is to happen.(AT1)

Related to this is the skill needed to sell the concept of the model. As it turned out, in both cases, the learning organisation concept sold the YOME model but that, in its turn, helped sell the consultancy itself. I was able to present the model as a vehicle for the consultancy and this was an attraction. As Burdett points out, "an established format allows preparation, analysis and reflection to be part of the question development process: all essential aspects of ongoing learning." (Burdett 1994 p.36)

The model was a framework for dialogue – that was established much more quickly because we had the model (AT1)

At BSET respondents said that the model helped direct the discussion which might otherwise have got side-tracked quite easily. "It's useful to have something that keeps you within certain parameters" (BH1). Furthermore, the very fact that it presents as so systematic meant that it was easier to sell to the wider intra-organisational audience (even though they didn't understand all the steps in it or even the overall purpose behind it).

At times the facilitation was difficult, though. At the initial meeting with the management group at BSET it gradually became clear that the choice-making was going to be very convoluted. It was as if a whole agenda for change needed to be set at a strategic level before they could make the choices in the model. This may have been symptomatic of a general absence of strategic direction and a need to address major problems through short-term operational management rather than looking to the longer term and conducting a research exercise. Here the facilitation becomes an even greater challenge and I found myself having to leave the meeting with only a date for another meeting rather than any concrete decisions.

Sometimes the most innocent question can spark an animated discussion which, though tangential to the question posed is relevant to the study as a whole. For example at ACE I asked who should be involved with the choices stage and this sparked a very important (as it later turned out) discussion about leadership styles within the organisation.

A key learning point too, was that facilitating a discussion which is intended to lead to actual hard decisions is much harder the larger the number of people in the group. At ACE there were two people present for most of the choices stage (although Rob joined us at the end). At BSET there were seven and the discussion was much more difficult to handle and led to less definite conclusions. I felt that my facilitation skills (honed during teaching) were up to the task of provoking and maintaining discussion but less than equal to the challenge of achieving consensus on a way forward. Re-reading the records, I find that it is surprising that we even took the work any further after the initial meeting. Interviews show that my memory of it is more negative than that of the other participants.

Trying to establish a way forward was probably less important to them than it was to me. Perhaps what they wanted was an interesting discussion. At the same time, they were tired and would probably have liked to focus on more short-term operational goals. The outcome was that they decided to take a broad overview and look at the views of staff as to where they were with relation to the learning organisation jig-saw. This obviated the need to choose areas for study and would give them a starting point for further work.

Building comfortable relationships

During the course of the two consultancy exercises I felt that the softer skills of consultancy were very important. Setting out to build close working partnerships with the two key organisational champions helped smooth the way for the acceptance of the study in the organisation. It also helped ensure that those two individuals were prepared to give me time to discuss their view of the process, thus enabling the Action Research to take place. My usual approach to working relationships is to break the maxim 'business before pleasure'. I will often discuss the personal contact which led us to meet, the weather, the pressure they are under to deliver to targets, their families and friends before getting down to business. There is an appropriate moment to move from one to the other and 'reading' this is part of the consultant's skill.

What I felt in these two cases was particularly important was being empathetic. At BSET it was clear that the pressure they were under was almost intolerable. They were working excessive hours, dealing with the demands of multiple stakeholders and disillusioned teachers and generally giving all of themselves. Demonstrating that I understood this pressure helped establish good working relationships. The importance of empathy became particularly clear at ACE after the Board where I spent a long time with Sue helping her to deal with what she had experienced as a snub to our work and to her role on the Board.

Part of this softer side of consultancy includes being flexible about the timing of meetings, about venues and about combining business with meals and social contact. Chandler (1984) advises that meeting outside of the normal pressures of work provide the opportunity to get better acquainted or to meet

key people you wouldn't see otherwise. I got up at 7.30 one Saturday morning to talk to someone at ACE who said that was a quiet time at work and he wouldn't be interrupted. My preference is not to eat and work together but when the client wanted that I obliged. I also invited Sue to my home for lunch when I carried out the final interview with her and we spent a lot of time discussing personal issues as well as the state of the company and the contribution the study had made (AS3). Where the clients treated me to meals and to hospitality at their premises I made a point of thanking them and emphasising that the experience had been pleasurable.

A result of this combination of empathy and professionalism is that when I comment positively about the organisation, the client bristled with pride. I remember recounting my very positive first impressions of the Company to Sue when we were carrying out the initial meeting. I mentioned that I was impressed by the Investor in People certificate proudly on show and the leaflets on the notice board about internal courses and potential for development at the local College (AROl1).

This empathy and good manners can be very tiring. Combining it with the vital facilitation process where the consultant has to concentrate hard, respond quickly and keep discussion under control is altogether shattering. In other respects also, the picture was not 100% rosy. It was not always possible to build trusting relationships and in some cases my only contact with a member of staff was a phone call. When I asked him what problems he saw with the process we were going through, one respondent at ACE said

Suspicion. People will be suspicious of your motives and of your integrity. People will be thinking 'is she going to tell the Directors what I've said?'

After all sometimes you're on the end of the phone – they don't know you at all. (AT1)

Perhaps this is a gender issue. I certainly felt more comfortable working with the two women champions of the Action Research than I did with any of the men I came into contact with in the client organisations. However, I suspect that is more to do with their personalities (and maybe my reaction to them) than to their gender, although there may be some relation between the two. The literature on gender differences in management is somewhat inconclusive. When surveyed, female managers have indicated that they are more innovative (Bass et al 1996), better at getting the job done and setting priorities than their male counterparts (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998; Bass et al, 1996) In addition, they expressed the belief that female managers are stronger team builders and developers of their staff (Alimo-Metcalf, 1998; Bass et al 1996; Rosener, 1990, 1996). Other researchers studying management behaviour have reported that there are no significant differences in the ways that males and females manage (Vilkinas and Cartan, 1997; Wajcman, 1996; Billing and Alvesson, 1994). Vilkinas conducted a study of 'significant others' (staff, peer and boss) views of managers which indicated that the gender of the manager does not impact on how they are perceived, rather it is how effective they are as managers that determines their significant others' perceptions.

Relating this to my own experience, I would suggest that my own gender and preferred management styles led me to work well with the two women with whom I was interacting most closely. Although our gender was significant to us it was our chosen style of working; returning calls, maintaining communication links, delivering on promises, speaking highly of the work to others etc which enabled successful interaction to take place. We had a

shared view that the work was important and that learning and involving people in learning within the organisation would serve the organisations well.

There was certainly a feeling at ACE that 'people issues' (as Sue called them) were less important than the other things the Board had been discussing (AROI5). This was evidenced by Rob's minimal input, Simon's complete absence from the process, the short shrift given to the study by other members of the Board, the reporting (and, I suspect, planting) of suspicion by the (male) Regional Manager and the responses of some of the mostly male interviewees in the study who clearly viewed it and the learning organisation concept it espoused as a disruption to their 'real work'.

Perhaps also, the way the clients worked with me depended on the participants' professional backgrounds and usual ways of doing business. I have recorded feeling left out of an important decision to do with the study at BSET and noted that I thought this was a product of the professional roles of people I was dealing with. I said

> Not only are they very senior but also they are professionals and
> teachers so they are used to taking decisions and being bossy! Sue at
> ACE would certainly have checked that with me before proceeding.
> Interestingly different response. (BROI4)

As the literature shows, the softer skills of relationship management are vital in consultancy (Chandler 1984; Block 1981; Markham 1998; Schaffer 1997). Experiences with the two clients suggest that my interactions with the two women with whom I worked most closely were very positive and they acted as advocates for our joint work in the organisation. It was to those relationships

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that I paid most attention (with some success). The area of the impact of gender on these working relationships is one which deserves further attention.

How much 'steer'?

The literature on consultancy emphasises the importance of clarifying objectives:

> It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which goals/objectives give character and direction to human activities. Goals and objectives offer a meaningful orientation to any activity; they lend it purpose.
>
> Blake and Mouton 1983 p. 98

However the literature says little on the neutrality of the consultant. Consultants need to be seen to achieve results in order to be re-employed to work with the organisation. Presenting options and remaining neutral over the choices the client makes may make them appear weak. Schaffer (1997) discusses the problem that clients may be reluctant to implement their recommendations and advises the consultant to be 'assess client readiness'. In a sense this is also part of the facilitation of YOME. The consultant needs to be able to assess the client's readiness to engage with the choices they are being offered and make a judgement about when and why to steer the client in a particular direction depending on their readiness to either make up their own minds or be steered.

Schaffer (1997) describes one of the five fatal flaws of traditional consulting as where 'the project is defined in terms of the consultant's expertise or products not in terms of specific client results to be achieved' (p. 18). In presenting

YOME I have, in a sense, defined the project in terms of my expertise but the fact that it is a choice-based model puts the onus back on the client to lead the work in a particular direction.

During the course of the facilitation, the issue of the extent to which I steered the clients in particular directions was essential to the principle of client choice. If YOME is a choice-based model, surely I should be allowing clients a completely free choice. In the interviews I asked respondents how they felt about having all these choices and whether they would want me to give them more answers. The following answer from Heather is typical:

> I felt very positive about the choices in the Model because it allowed us to be flexible about what we wanted to look at. I hadn't considered doing a questionnaire until we had gone into what we were trying to do. I wouldn't want you to lead more than you did. You have offered things at appropriate times.... I felt you reflected back what we were saying and your reflections back were accurate perceptions of what we was being said. (BS2)

But I can not deny that I had my own agendas. I wanted to consider the usefulness of the learning organisation in the evaluation of management development. I was aware of my own preferences for certain parts of the Model such as the view of the learning organisation which Pedler et al (1997) advocate. I was more interested in the impact of management development on the organisation as a whole than on individuals or teams because I felt that less research had been completed in that area. In my reflections on the choices stage at ACE I wrote:

It didn't take long for them to decide that they wanted to focus on the learning organisation. Did I push them in that direction? Maybe with another organisation I would need to make the other choices equally attractive. Alternatively I could do that only when the research is complete because I want to test the learning organisation idea. Looking at individual views etc won't achieve that aim but I am guiding choices rather too much in that direction. (AROI3)

At the same point, I noted that

the evaluation of the impact on co-workers didn't attract them. I'm not sure why. Maybe I didn't explain it much. (AROI3)

At BSET my notes reflect a similar dilemma. I noted that allowing the organisations to make their own choices was sometimes painful. I wrote:

They went through a rambling discussion and I could easily have structured it more but then the outcome wouldn't have been theirs. I think now my responsibility is to hold on to the issues identified and take them forward. Maybe I should think about reminding them of things which were dropped when they have finished looking at the aspects they have decided to focus on.(BROI2)

Apart from the issue of pushing them towards what I was interested in, I was also guilty of pushing them away from aspects of the model which were perhaps in need of more development. I was conscious of my perceived weaknesses in the model, particularly that the section on the impact on co-workers had fewer options in it that the others. As it turned out both

organisations were most enthusiastic about looking at the learning organisation so I didn't have to steer hard away from less developed areas.

Nevertheless, the balance between their choice and my guidance seems to have been appropriate. In the interviews forming part of the action research I asked 'Would you prefer the consultant to give you more answers?'. In every case the respondents said no. They felt that there was an appropriate balance between my inputs and theirs. They knew it was important for them to discuss and study their own issues.

A second issue concerning the degree of steer the consultant should give arose in the 'How' phase. I had enough experience of research to know that some decisions in the 'How' phase could jeopardise objectivity and create practical difficulties. The whole model sets up a sequence of decision-making (to which I will return) but to what extent should the consultant push the clients to stick to that exact sequence? Sue at ACE was interested in exploring issues of managing diversity but I pointed out that this would mean obtaining very individual views on how people were being managed. I suggested this was incompatible with confidentiality so it was abandoned and the subsequent decision to go for questionnaires on follower-readiness did not elicit a sufficient response rate to make any generalisations possible about managers' differentiation in management style with different people. Had I allowed that decision to go ahead some useful views may have been obtained but the response rate may have been even lower because the questions were so personal.

We also had discussion about issues of how to word questionnaires. Here I allowed the client to steer much more because they knew their staff better

than I did. At ACE we were surveying factory-floor operatives with varying levels of education and attitudes to learning. I allowed Sue to guide me on the exact wording of questions (AQ1). At BSET Heather's opinion was that we needed to make very few changes to the wording of the learning organisation jig-saw as it was fairly generic and clear. We did change 'Company' to 'Team' and made a few other similar changes but on the whole we left the wording intact. As it turned out some of those who did not respond gave the unfamiliar language in the questionnaire as their reason for not completing it. So, maybe I should have pushed hard for a simplification (BQ1).

In the same regard, Heather and I had a difference of view about Heather's proposal to take each statement in the jig-saw and ask staff their views of each on a Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. I advised that this would make the questionnaire very long, complex and off-putting (BROl3). Heather, however, insisted and that was what we did. At that point I felt that my guidance had been very clear and if they wished to make that decision anyway then they knew the potential consequence. The fact that I turned out to be right gave me no pleasure. I would have preferred to see a higher response rate as a result of a more manageable and easily completed questionnaire.

A further issue with relation to the question of how much the consultant should steer concerns taking the steps out of sequence. The model presupposes that the 'What' decisions will be made first, then the 'How'. In practice it is tempting for practical managers to leap straight to the 'How' phase and lose the value of thinking about what they are really trying to achieve before they allow practical reality to flood in and prevent them achieving that. In this way, for example, the BSET management team started to talk about the opportunity presented

by the Staff Conference before they had worked out just what they wanted to know. This immediately caused them to say 'we can't do interviews at the staff conference because everyone will be too busy' (BROI2). So, the methods were preceding the aims. For them to benefit from a systematic structured approach like this it is essential to be guided into taking the steps one at a time. If they want the benefits of a formal, structured approach they need to be patient and take the steps in their intended sequence.

In this situation, the question for the consultant is 'how much do I push in a particular direction?' My approach has been to guide gently but leave the client to make the final decision. As Wills (1993) explains, any evaluation needs to take account of the needs of the organisation and, ultimately, the client knows more about this that the consultant ever can. As Wrennal (1998) says, having choices allows choice rather than rejection and enables managers to perform their function of decision making. However, having a completely open and free choice can be bewildering and YOME does present a very great range of possibilities. So, some guidance towards particular choices will be beneficial to the client.

Experience in carrying out these two pieces of consultancy using a choice-based model suggests that there is a range of factors in the decision about how much steer to give. These need to be weighed in the balance in the split second when the consultant makes the decision about how much to push in a particular direction. The factors include where the expertise lies (with the consultant or the client?) on a particular issue; how insistent the client is on a particular course of action; who has the power to make that action happen; and how important that decision is to the whole value of the study. In each case the consultant must make an on-the-spot decision about how hard to

push. At times the consultant may witness the client making what seems to the consultant to be the 'wrong' decision. If so, and they are aware of the consultant's advice, in a sense this absolves the consultant. Unfortunately, a consultant cannot say 'I told you so' but what he or she can say is 'this is a product of the choices we made at the beginning'. In the action phase the consultant can always redress areas which the client now feels warranted study or a decision can be made leave it and move forward. Either way the client has made the choice and cannot unmake it.

Responses to the consultant as a person

The consultant as a person and the perceptions of him or her have an impact on the study and its findings. Whilst I asked the interviewees about my skills, I did not expressly ask about their perceptions of my identity. It was not the central purpose of the work to examine this issue but it would be an omission not to mention it with relation to the insights these studies have given to the process of consultancy.

The decision-makers at both organisations showed respect for my expertise and facilitation skill. Their occasional rather negative views about consultants in general seemed not to be reflected in their attitudes towards me. Nevertheless, the dismissiveness of the study by the ACE Board may have been symptomatic of their view of some aspect of me as a person. The Board was all male apart from Sue. It is impossible to be sure that my gender contributed to their dismissiveness but that was certainly Sue's view. I was working in a very male-dominated industry without sharing the family history which (along with the strength of her personality) gave Sue such credibility.

My position as an academic may have caused them to consider me out of touch. It certainly did not seem to give me any additional credibility. One Board member spoke condescendingly of the need to pilot the wording of questionnaires when I had quite clearly explained that we had already done that (AROI5). These issues are difficult to isolate and determine but on an instinctive level they seem to be relevant.

When working with the factory floor workers (who were invariably men) I was treated with respect and, for the most part, everyone was willing to answer my questions with honesty. Nevertheless, some of the vulcanisers and engineers must have found my accent and language unfamiliar. As I met them in the Finance Director's office (he was away), they were not on 'their own territory' and they probably perceived me as 'management' despite my efforts to reassure them that I was completely independent and their individual views would go no further (AROI4). Without being patronising I tried (especially in the one-to-one interviews) to explain with care what I wanted to know without leading them in a particular direction. Nevertheless, I sometimes felt there to be a chasm between us of different experiences, socialisation, attitudes and language.

At BSET I was working with people with backgrounds much closer to my own. The professional staff in the Team, particularly the advisers, were graduates with some conceptual frameworks for their work which were not unlike my own. They seemed to respect my expertise and skills. We had also worked together before. The administrative, clerical, catering and cleaning staff, however, did not know me at all. I relied on Heather's presentation of me in the covering letter to the questionnaire to establish my identity and credibility with them (BQ!).

In the consultancy process, as in research more generally, anyone providing information to a questioner is, in a sense, vulnerable. They are exposing their view to a stranger and they may perceive this as threatening. Trust is, therefore vitally important and this is recognised in the literature and supported in this work. Block (1981), for example, advocates putting distrust into words so that it can be countered and trust built.

Speaking more generally, perceptions of the consultant must vary according to factors like these all the time. Ultimately, it is the consultant's responsibility to demonstrate their professionalism and overcome any potential prejudices he or she may encounter. Were I to experience overt discrimination in a consultancy interaction I would be likely to deal with it in exactly the way I would elsewhere – respond calmly on the basis of my expertise and deflect the personal comments. As always, covert prejudice is much more difficult to identify and address.

Politics in the client organisation

The interplay of personalities, agendas and politics in the client organisation has vital implications for the consultant. For extensive discussion of this see Blake and Mouton, 1983. These can manifest themselves in a number of ways. At ACE the power-play between Rob as Company Director and his son Simon as Engineering Director influenced much of the way the Company worked and the reception Sue got for her HR-focussed work. BSET was a very new organisation where patterns of power, responsibility and influence were still being established. Professional educational advisers are at the top of the organisation and this affects political behaviour elsewhere in the Team.

In relation to these two studies I will give examples of four different ways in which politics affected my work as consultant. Firstly, politics affected the choices made at the 'what' phase. Secondly, it affected who really made the choices. Thirdly, politics had an impact on how the study was received and finally they effected what action was taken in consequence.

BSET's discussion about the model sparked a lot of discussion about leadership approaches in the Team. There were clearly long-running debates in the organisation concerning issues such as leadership styles and the nature and practice of participative planning. For this reason, the choice was made to try to discover staff views of these issues through the learning organisation questionnaire, which includes leadership issues (see Appendix 5).

Heather thought they really had to think about Participative Policy-Making. She felt it was time for them to move to a more participative style but she was aware that other people in the group felt it was too early for that.(BROl2)

After long discussions at ACE where numerous possibilities had been thrashed out, Rob came in and, without listening to a summary of our discussion, introduced new possibilities and views. This made it difficult to arrive at firm conclusions. His position in the Company means that he commands both respect and deference. The Regional Manager described him as strong-willed and in Rob's presence he was quiet and unassertive. Whilst we were not deflected completely from our course, Rob was never completely attuned to Sue and I's thinking either and this had an impact later on the way the work was received.

At BSET there was a lot of discussion in the first Management Team meeting (BROI1) about who should make the choices. It was suggested that the School Effectiveness Team Day itself could be used but that would gather together over 90 people and decision-making in such a large team would have been very difficult. The Management Group (consisting of the senior management team and the second level team managers) was still too large. This sparked a long discussion about the nature of and need for leadership in the organisation and whether the senior management team taking these decisions would give the message that they didn't want to involve people.

Sue reported that some people at ACE, especially specialists like the finance people were very sceptical about the importance of human resource issues. She said "there was a bit of a macho view that this learning stuff is a women's thing." (AS2) This was reflected in the reception the findings of the study was given at the Board. When I presented my findings I had the feeling that most Board members just wanted to be elsewhere. At ACE it took true assertiveness on Sue's part to overcome the dismissiveness of the Board meeting and get the work taken seriously. As a consequence, changes have been made and the learning organisation project (through Shaping the Future) is going ahead. However, it could easily have been completely scuppered by the emotional interaction of the Board. The Board meeting I attended was a turning point in Rob's attitudes to HR issues. Sue said

> I do feel that the presentation of these results to the Board was a very emotional catalyst for a lot of change. It led to Rob's greater involvement with the HR and change issues. He's going to deliver parts of the training to the new people in Cornwall because the survey recognised the issue of him becoming detached from the workforce

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and losing the family firm atmosphere that he used to relish so much. He's also put out a paper called Shaping the Future Phase 2. (AS3)

At BSET, the discussion before, during and after the study about the level of participation in policy-making led directly to the creation of a middle managers' group which is intended to be the 'power house' of strategic development of the Team in the future.

With relation to internal politics and personality issues, the lesson for consultancy from this action research is that it is vital to get the right people supporting your project from the start. This may mean people in positions of both formal and informal power.

Barriers to engagement

In all consultancy there will be barriers to engagement, particularly cost, perceptions of expertise, openness to new ideas and resistance to change (Schaffer, 1997; Block, 1981; Markham, 1998). In these two cases, all of these barriers were in a sense present. Although the clients were not charged for the experience (as I was trying out the model), they needed to make an investment of time and there was some commitment to give me interviews for my research in return for the work I did with them. In future cases where the Model is used there will be a series of charges depending on the nature of the work. This will need to take into account the nature and quantity of the primary data collection in the study and the amount of time spent in the 'choices' stage. The scale of charges is included at Appendix 6. On the basis of this schedule I calculated how much each client would have been charged and asked the crucial question 'would you have paid for this consultancy

exercise?' In the case of ACE the work would have cost £5,000. When I asked Sue if ACE would have done it she said:

> Yes. I would have to have got Board approval for it and I would have to have presented the business benefits to the Board – both short and long term but I think they would have gone for it. I would have convinced them. We could have taken it from the training budget. They're willing to invest in the training and development of people and this was part of that. That also might have meant that they had more ownership of it from the start. We have to know the value of it to the company. It's very difficult to put a value on really. It's valuable just to have a dialogue and make us think about what we want to do. It makes you give time to those issues. (AS3)

At BSET I asked 'What would you think about paying for my services as a consultant for this? It would have cost £4,600 at normal Business School rates – would you have paid for it?' Heather's answer was

> Sounds too expensive for education. What did that include?... Well my initial reaction was because of our limited budget but it's not actually expensive at all. Within the options there'd be elements we'd definitely pay for – the face-to-face consultancy bits. We may do the questionnaire ourselves – we have people who are well able to do that and the new Research and Information Officer would be able to do it, for example. If we were a trading business we would have gone for the whole package. (BS2)

This perhaps demonstrates a difference between public and private sector attitudes to the cost of consultancy. Public sector institutions are more likely to

put up a cost-induced barrier to this kind of work unless there is a sources of funding specifically made available.

In order to address the issue of taking on the costs involved I have developed copy for a leaflet which attempts to present the benefits to the client of using the model to structure their thinking. This will be used in marketing the Model. It is included at Appendix 7.

The second barrier to engagement is more subtle. It concerns attitudes to where expertise resides in the consultancy relationship. In my case, I was perceived quite positively at both organisations. The fact that I was an academic from a University and that I was studying for a Doctoral qualification may also have given me greater credibility but it might just as easily have had the effect of my being perceived as out of touch with the 'real world'.

This also, however, works in reverse: I recognised the clients' own expertise with relation to their organisations and professions. In making this clear I was showing respect for those with whom I worked. This is an approach which seems, from this experience, to smooth the process of interaction and ensure close engagement. In a sense what is happening is collaborative learning through mutual recognition of knowledge and expertise.

In summary: the findings relating to the research question 'what insights did the exercise give on the consultancy process?' are as follows: The clients enormously valued the enabling style as giving them choice over the approach to evaluation. In order for them to successfully negotiate their way through the choices they needed a consultant with well developed facilitation skills in order to structure and manage their choice-making. Connected with this, the softer

skills of relationship management were extremely important, particularly empathy, flexibility and professionalism. The work for the two client studies required the consultant to make speedy and responsive decisions about how often and how hard to steer the client in a particular direction. All of these skills of the consultant interact with a variety of other personal factors to shape the perception of the consultant which in turn affects the way client and consultant interact. Organisational politics impacted upon the consultancy throughout in ways which were unpredictable and often highly significant. Finally, the studies show that the consultant needs to be aware of the potential barriers to engagement which the consultancy process can set up and that cost is a very important one but so is mutual understanding of where expertise lies and therefore who should work on which aspects of the joint working plan.

How did YOME work in the two case study settings?

This is the final research question which has been addressed in this piece of action research. It concerns the value of the Model itself rather than the way in which I facilitated its use. For a reminder about the content, stages and presentation of the Yates Options Model for Evaluation please see Appendix 1. I have structured this section under the following headings: initial and general impressions; 'real world academic'; structured stages in the Model; the options base; the research-based method used; and presentation issues.

Initial and General Impressions

Sue's first impression on hearing my explanation of what the YOME was about was to say 'it's very deep' (AROI1). This may be a result of the speedy way in which I introduced the Model to her but I then went on to show her the Model

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on the computer and run through the slides quickly. She said that they had been intending to make an assessment of where they are but that it was "not as well-formulated as what you are proposing". She felt that the Model stimulated her thinking and this was gratifying as the intention was always to do this rather than to give her or the organisation answers. As time went on Sue frequently reflected on the fact that the Model had been tremendously useful in giving her flesh on the bones of what they know from their own experience. It also gave her fuel for making her own case about the importance of HR in the company. She said "I can get mileage from this." (AS2) Her impression was that

The Model gave us the opportunity to bring things together that I wouldn't have brought together before. What we were doing was fragmented. The Model was well thought-out, structured. It gave me the opportunity to surface some nagging issues and concerns. It enabled me to instigate or initiate some soul-searching on my part. If I hadn't done some company development learning it might have made me think 'Oh my God - I never thought of that'. For us it was comforting that it reflected back some of the things we were doing already. It made me feel we were going along the right lines because we were in tune with modern thinking. We were developing the Company on modern management lines.... The Model presented us with a framework for dialogue. Communication was established much more quickly because we had the Model.... The project gave us the jolt we needed to get back on track which does not detract from our long terms strategy and aims.... So the project helped to rekindle the flame of change. If you don't keep doing that you lose the benefits of what you've already done. We got to hear what we needed to know about. (AS3)

This is clearly a very positive endorsement of the Model and the thinking behind it but this view was not universally shared at ACE. My other interviewee, Alan Trippier seemed to have a much less clear understanding of what the Model set out to do and, as a result valued it less highly. When I asked him 'what were your first impressions of YOME? He said:

> Quite good. I didn't think they suited the Company exactly. I feel we're in a specialised industry. That's made for general business; nut and bolt type companies. We're people-orientated. A long time ago it might have suited us but not now. (AT1)

The reasons for this statement could be numerous: misunderstanding of the Model, less involvement than, for example, Sue; suspicion of an outsider coming in; or indeed the sub-agenda that at this time this respondent was planning an imminent departure from the Company to set up in competition and was critical of the Shaping the Future project. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that the Model may confuse people and may be perceived as focussing on one aspect of business over another. Indeed this was echoed at BSET where some questionnaire respondents felt that the language used was not relevant to their specific organisation. This is, perhaps a wider question about the universality of business models.

A further aspect of these general impressions is that the clients felt that YOME gave them clear ideas for strategic development of their organisations. It helped them tease out what their choices were for organisational development.

At BSET there was a lot of recognition that the Model gave them choices. There was a recognition that the process is possibly even more important than the outcome. There was a clear view that the transformative potential of the Model lay in the process and not in the results of any survey or study which would be undertaken. Lesley Hepworth, an interview respondent there said:

It was very clear. It puts things in order which is helpful – sometimes you're not sure what to do first.... You can see where it's leading. It's very succinct. There are clear choices to make. (BH1)

From the start Heather was clear that the discussion we would have together would be almost as important as the results of the study of staff views. In retrospect she was able to say:

It has helped me to understand where people are and where I am. People are expressing their philosophy through expressing their priorities. It revealed where people are on a continuum concerning leadership and enabling learning in the organisation. Before the discussions we've had I knew people believed in certain things but it has sharpened my understanding.... It raises a lot of areas we might want to explore. I wish we had more time to explore things in depth. We can come back to them later though and this just sets some agendas.... It acted as a catalyst for other people to become involved in the learning organisation philosophy. (BS2)

Again, however, there was a different view from interview respondents other than Heather. When I asked two of the other advisers at BSET for their first impressions of YOME one said:

I remember it as quite complex. Some of the language used was difficult to get into because it used different terms for issues – it seemed to originate from a business model rather than an educational one. (BA/D1)

'Real World' Model

The view from both clients was that although the Model was based on academic research and conceptual models, it was still very grounded and 'real world'. There was a theoretical basis which really made it more than consultancy (although I would argue that good consultants always use theory).

At ACE the inclusion of other people's research into the Model gave it credibility. Their managers were able to use that thinking to develop their own.

> It's real world and not too academic but it was a chance to look at what's new.... I've noticed the word good practice creeping in to business from education and I feel we've been doing that. This Model is helping me and us check against these things. We've had some of our managers coming back from bigger companies saying that they're looking at the same sort of things – Business Excellence, IiP etc. It is good to feel that you are in on the latest things. With the learning organisation being in this I felt it was about the latest ideas. In a fast-changing world it's good to do something so considered. It's how development should be done. Some people are experimenting with real business and some of it is dangerous. This is more feet on the ground. You can't let your people be guinea pigs. (AS1)

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Similarly at BSET the view was

> You know your business – the business of using the model, being a
> consultant and understanding the learning organisation. You offered
> some examples which immediately rang true. You had your feet on the
> ground – it wasn't airy-fairy and academic. (BS2)

I found that even where the Model could have been more explicit or didn't seem to fit the client needs, the philosophy behind it was very clear and strong. Whenever I started to feel that the model was really too simple, I returned to the idea that the clients could choose their own direction so there was a feeling that the Model was rooted in a solid conceptual view that choice was the important component of the approach. There was always the option to include some management theory that wasn't already in the model. That was part of the flexibility that was built in but the good thing was there was usually some model or set of concepts which had been expressed by a respected author and which could be drawn upon in order to lend credibility to the idea.

So, for example, when issues around the preparedness of individuals to be led in new directions came up at ACE, I was able to suggest we use Hersey and Blanchard's models of leadership (Hersey and Blanchard, 1993) which take into account readiness to be led. This gave our study more rigour and a framework for questions to the staff.

A final aspect of this so-called 'real world' issue is the question of whether management theory like this is universally applicable. My view is that it is applicable because good management theory takes account of the context in which it is applied. So, for example, the learning organisation model takes

cognisance of the fact that every organisation's environment, history, internal strengths and weaknesses are different. However, any client using YOME may perceive this differently and wish to avoid generic models like these which they view as having been developed in, for example, a private sector context or in a different sector of industry.

Structure

The Model is structured and systematic with what is intended to be a logical order to the choices made starting with 'what', going on to 'how', 'results' and 'action'. This was generally well-received. Sue said that it made sense and she liked that style of working. Heather said:

> The phases are very apt. It gives time to be able to consider what you want to look at. They are in the right order. (BS1)

Some respondents needed to be reminded of what the stages were when I asked for views of them in the interviews. This made me think that I had perhaps not emphasised them enough or that perhaps they were not as important to the clients as they were to me in organising discussions with the clients.

During the course of the two cases this structure was sometimes followed and sometimes ignored. There was a tendency to jump stages and, particularly to move to the 'how' stage before the 'what' stage was complete. For example, at BSET the upcoming Team Day was discussed as a place for doing the before the 'what' phase was finished. The experience with BSET suggested that there is a natural tendency to do this but it needs careful management. It took

all my consultancy skill to stop it happening. The Model itself could be amended to make it impossible to make the jump from 'What' to 'How' too early but this may make using the Model too rigid a process and cause it to lose some of the advantages of flexibility.

Also, because the stages were not always followed, ideas occasionally got lost in the complexity of our discussions. So, for example, at ACE the idea came up in discussion that the regions were all very different and there were traditions and working patterns which varied from one place to the next (ARO|2). It might have been interesting to explore that in the context of the learning organisation and see how the Company could benefit from experiences in different places. However, the idea was lost somehow perhaps because it didn't fit well into the staged process we were going through. A future of version of YOME could have an electronic repository for noting down ideas which might otherwise get lost as a result of following the staged process. Then they could be returned to with ease and again choices could be made about whether or not to pursue them.

During the course of discussions at both ACE and BSET it became clear that it would have been useful to have a 'why' phase first to establish the motivation for doing such a study. There was sometimes confusion over what exactly we were trying to do. My agenda was evaluation of management development but the clients' agendas was often broader. At BSET we moved all the time between discussion of the evaluation of where the organisation was and where it wanted to be. Although I emphasised that objective setting and the means to achieve them was part of the action phase it was still, sometimes, confused with the evaluation.

In both organisations we spent a lot of time discussing who should be involved with making the choices within the Model and whose views should be sought in order to carry out the evaluation. For example, at BSET there was discussion of the possibility that the larger management Group of about 15 people should be used for making the choices in order to widen ownership of the process but that was rejected on the grounds that it would be too big for straightforward decision-making.

> Before you make major decisions you need a dialogue with a range of people. It comes down to perceptions of what's needed. When you have a diverse range of people (we work in very different teams) they all need to be involved in identifying priorities. I'm not sure the model enabled that. (BH1)

So, it soon became clear that there should be a 'who' stage too. At ACE this may have avoided the problem of the Managing Director's absence at the choices stage and could have led to a better reception at the subsequent Board meeting. When the introduction of these two additions to the Model were suggested both clients thought they would be positive changes to make.

In both cases, too, I found that the energy in the client organisations for progressing the work petered out somewhat after the Results phase. This may be just that the organisations took the findings forward themselves. Certainly in the case of ACE this was true. However, the fact that there are four clear phases enabled me to achieve closure on the work. The two client organisations planned in changes and developments which were partly a result of our study together and partly a result of other organisational development initiatives that were going on anyway. This seems entirely

appropriate and roots the studies firmly within their context. Our work connected well with these other initiatives. So although we ran out of time for the consultancy work, the action phase still happened.

The options-based approach

The nature of the options and how the clients were led through them has been discussed elsewhere but it is important to comment here that the sheer number of options in the model is both a strength and a weakness. The complexity created by so many options make for a rich discussion. Through this means I have an opportunity to show that there are many ways of taking the work forward (all supported by theory and credible authors). Also, the clients find a choice-based model non-threatening because there are lots of options. They feel there is something there for them no matter what stage of development they are at.

However, the complexity of the model has the disadvantage that it takes a long time to work through all the choices. Each theory needs some explanation and then there needs to be some discussion about its value and appropriateness. It is sometimes perceived as complex and people need to absorb the ideas and choices in a short time. On balance it seems that it shouldn't be simplified because it will lose a lot of its strength but it also should not be added to as this would make it confusing. Perhaps a parallel, more complex version should be created for the consultant for which additional options would be presented to the client if the discussion went in that direction. In future I will prepare clients for the amount of time it will take to make the choices and grasp the content of the model.

There will always be other options which could be included, for example the leadership issues that featured a great deal in my discussions with clients. Also, concepts of managing diversity and learning from the diverse individuals and groups in organisations could be included. I have decided, however, not to complicate the model further with these at present but merely to have them in my mind in future discussions with clients.

Research-based methods used

YOME concerns evaluation and evaluation is a form of research (Bassey 1995). The intention throughout is to find out what is happening and move towards some action. For the most part, this was welcomed by the clients. Sue felt that using a research-based approach would result in the establishment of facts rather than just local opinion. It also provided the senior management with feedback from operatives. They don't usually get that from operatives, only from managers. Heather said "research will find out the areas that need sorting out e.g. peoples' perceptions of their own roles which may be different from their colleagues' perceptions." (BROI2) When one of the other advisers suggested that they had already asked the staff what they thought about the Team, Heather replied that they

> hadn't take a considered research view of it. It's not enough to talk and then go forward there is a need to be more systematic. (BROI2)

With both clients I carried out interviews and sent questionnaires as part of the consultancy study to elicit the views of staff about the learning organisation and (in the case of ACE) related issues. Generally speaking these were received well and response rates were average for postal questionnaires at

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around 30%. In both cases I tried to follow good research practice and pilot questions, triangulate where possible and generally do all I could to ensure anonymity for respondents and reassurance that their personal views would be treated in confidence. Interestingly, despite all those efforts, there was sometimes the perception that the methodology was unsound. In particular, one member of the ACE board advised me to pilot questions (although I had already told him that I had done so). Another scorned the sample size even though it was 100% of the staff. A low response rate may be indicative of a reluctance to speak out which is interesting in itself.

Some comments were made from time to time about the validity of doing research. For example, Alan Trippier commented that if we sent out questionnaires or did interviews

> a lot depends on the state of mind of the person when they complete it. If I've just given a rollicking to a lad he'll give contentious answers. If he's just had a bonus he'll say nicer things. You've got to be aware of that. (AT1)

So, doing a piece of research as part of the consultancy study has the same advantages and disadvantages as doing research more generally. Sometimes the possibility of doing some kind of research hadn't occurred to the clients. In the course of getting on with running the organisation, sometimes a reflective look at what is happening and systematically obtaining views from staff is simply low in the agenda. As Heather said "I hadn't thought of doing a questionnaire until it came up as a choice in the 'how' phase." (BS2)

Commitment and time

Any evaluation, but particularly an evaluation as big as this takes a tremendous amount of time and commitment. There will always be shorter term, more operational and more pressing demands on managers' time in the client organisation. At BSET it was very clear that the pressure to perform for OFSTED and ensure their very survival combined with their day-to-day commitments meant that devoting time to longer term planning such as this sometimes felt like a luxury they could ill afford. Nevertheless, in the post-inspection lull they had found time and space to set up more strategic discussions.

When asked what they saw as the major problems with the YOME all respondents (at both client organisations) replied that the main problem was the difficulty in giving it sufficient time. Heather said:

> We were constrained by where we were and the decisions we needed to make. I would have preferred a day looking at the model with the Senior Management Team and another whole day at the conference and another day on the Action phase.... Timing could be agreed for the elements of process at the start. Really you were too nice. You need to say 'I need 3 hours for that.' Choice in the model is a great strength but you need to say just how long it will take. Recommend a period of time and state the minimum for it. Otherwise time for the choice isn't there.
> (BS2)

This is good advice which I have since followed to good effect.

Maintaining momentum through to the end of the study was difficult in both cases. Initial enthusiasm tended to wane and I found myself having to stress the importance of the Action phase which would otherwise have been lost in the pressures of other work.

Although I was aware beforehand of the commitment this kind of work requires, the YOME is perhaps more likely to provoke concerns about this than any other approach to evaluation. The very complexity of the Model makes the time commitment greater and as it is not an externally imposed set of criteria for evaluation, it requires greater thought and planning on the part of the organisation than an assessment against externally-devised standards.

Furthermore it is a major investment in time and energy on the part of the consultant. The process is characterised by lengthy explanations both orally and in writing of the Model and its components; long discussions to make the choices; complex plans for each study; checking the plans with the client; carrying out the study; analysing the results; presenting reports; working on action plans. All of this complexity and work needs to be very carefully costed.

In particular, if observation is chosen as the method of data collection for the study there would need to be an awareness of the time and therefore cost of such an approach which tends to be very labour intensive. Interviews too take time to arrange, carry out and transcribe. As with any piece of research the evaluation studies need time to be set up properly. For example, staff who are forewarned that a questionnaire is coming and that it is important are more likely to complete it than staff who simply receive it on their desk with a deadline for completion.

In both cases, but particularly at ACE we used existing events as triggers for deadlines within the study in order to ensure that those deadlines were met. So the study was planned for completion before the Team Development Day so that we would have some results to present. This concentrated my mind wonderfully for the preparation of the figures but the timescales were very pressured to get the questionnaire distributed, returned and analysed by that date.

Presentation Issues

During the course of the two case studies, the presentation of the YOME was refined and improved. Over the course of the two studies it gradually became clear that to market the Model successfully I would need very high quality packaging. The packaging also needs to be flexible enough to cope with all sizes of audience. With a large group a PowerPoint presentation might be best but in a small meeting this equipment can be cumbersome. At the ACE Board meeting there was no time to start up the computer or work through the slides at all so a glossy paper handout would have been a huge asset and would have looked very professional.

The Model was initially presented to ACE as a series of PowerPoint slides which I showed to Sue on a lap top computer at the initial meeting. At the second meeting I added a paper copy of all of the slides in the order they appear in the computerised version. This led me to think that page numbers were needed which corresponded with slide numbers on the screen so that the people at the meeting could follow where I was in the Model.

Nevertheless, some people had difficulty finding their way round the Model and so I colour-coded the pages for each phase so that it would be clear whether we are on the 'What', or 'How' phase in particular. When I came to use the Model with BSET I also changed some of the colours of the writing in the boxes to make it clearer. I found these small things were not important in terms of people's impressions of the Model but they could be minor irritations if they were wrong.

I also found that I needed a summary of the whole of YOME in order to present it to a wider audience at the Results stage. This I found very difficult to do because all attempts to summarise took out choices which are the essence of the Model. However, it was done and the outcome is included in Chapter 3. In future I would also use this at the initial stage and I would possibly include it in promotional literature along with the summary of the approach (Appendix 7).

It soon became obvious that some slides were more crucial than others. In particular the 'what' choices within the learning organisation part of the Model were an area which stimulated much conversation. This important slide needed to be connected easily with several others.

Another presentation issue concerned how the outcomes of decisions would be recorded and presented back to the client. After the first round of decision-making (and with the advice of the HND Computing students who were working on the Model), I decided that the boxes which had been chosen could be in a different colour thus demonstrating the pathway through the Model that each client had selected. A separate version of the Model could be saved for each client thus providing a record of the choices. Had the HND students completed their planned work, it would have been possible to print out a report

of the decisions taken without all the other choices being included but that was not to be. As a result, I had nothing to present back to the client in a paper format.

An alternative option was to write minutes or notes of the meetings but that is time-consuming and slow. Furthermore, I did not feel confident that they would be read. So, in both cases, I simply summarised action points at the end of each meeting and got on and did my own work. This does not, however, record the thought processes which are crucial to the study. The solution, from all these experiences, is to agree how this will be done with each client individually and charge appropriately.

Presentation is vital in achieving commitment to the work from the wider organisation. When the survey was sent out at BSET we distributed it with a covering letter on BSET's headed paper to show that it had the commitment and support of the management but we included reply-paid envelopes to me in order to ensure confidentiality (BQ1).

A further presentation issue is that once I have left the organisation and closed off the study, I can never know how the study and its results will be presented to interested parties when I have gone. As the outcome is the result of a joint effort, I wouldn't expect to have any control over this stage. This is a phase in the process which requires some relinquishing of control on the consultant's part. For example, Sue presented the findings of our work to a business development meeting shortly after the Board meeting I attended. I was unable to be present (and was, in any case, trying to extricate myself from further (unpaid) involvement). So, I simply had to leave her to it. I was pleased that the findings were being taken seriously and were acted upon. The findings

later also formed part of ACE's successful submission for reassessment for the Investor in People Award and quotes from the interviews were used in the Inspector's report. At BSET the fact that we were doing the survey was used in evidence to OFSTED. I never saw how this was presented to the assessors.

To summarise how YOME worked in the two client settings I would say that first impressions of the Model were very positive and both clients felt that it was not over–academic but allowed them to draw on the management literature to good effect. They perceived it as systematic and, although it could be amended to clarify the staged process, it would serve well in future similar studies. The clients and I found that the number of options in the Model is both a strength and a weakness because of the great choice it gave but the time it took to make the choices. The fact that the studies involved researching staff views on progress towards the learning organisation gave the studies credibility and stimulated reflection about the organisation. However, carrying out such a study involved a major time commitment which is hard to sustain for the full length of the project. The Model needs to be very well-presented and some minor changes will need to be made to the audio-visual material to ensure ease of use.

So, in answer to the final research question (how did the YOME work in the two client organisations) I can say that from all appearances it was well-received, reasonably practical and had some very great strengths which were perceived by the clients and used well in the process of understanding and developing their organisations. Further work will need to be done on the presentation of the Model and on the management of time in conducting the studies.

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the action research into the evaluation of management development using YOME and in particular its use of the learning organisation concept. It addresses the four research questions. These were firstly, what were the client organisations doing to evaluate the impact of management development on their organisations? Secondly, what was the impact of the concept of learning organisation to the approaches to evaluation with the clients? Thirdly, what insights did the exercise give on the consultancy process? Finally, how did YOME work in the two case study settings?

The findings relating to the first question are that in both client organisations, personal and organisational development was being carried out with each affecting the other but without systematic attempts to connect them or to evaluate the impact on the organisation. Whatever stage of management and organisational development the two clients were at, the Model applied equally well and seemed to be something which was valuable even where there hadn't been some form of systematic training. Similarly, the evaluation could be carried out at any time, irrespective of the stage of their development. Internal and external political pressures existed in both organisations to make an evaluation particularly valuable: the need to impress external inspectors at BSET and the need to raise the profile of staff development issues at ACE made the evaluation particularly apposite.

The findings for research question two are that the learning organisation concept is attractive to clients; it is all-embracing and broad-ranging and therefore flexible enough to use with a wide range of organisations at different

stages of development. The clients saw the learning organisation as an objective rather than a means of evaluation but our different conceptions did not prevent effective working but merely acted as the means of making choices. The clients also saw the whole process of evaluating progress towards the goal of becoming a learning organisation as valuable in itself because it stimulated reflection and communication.

The question 'what insights did the exercise give on the consultancy process?' can be answered as follows: The clients enormously valued the style of the consultancy process which stressed that the consultant was there to enable choices and change. In order for them to successfully negotiate their way through the choices they needed a consultant with highly developed facilitation skills in order to structure and manage their choice-making. Connected with this, the softer skills of relationship management were extremely important, particularly empathy, flexibility and professionalism. That flexibility is emphasised in the need for the consultant to make responsive decisions about steering the client in a particular direction. All of these skills of the consultant interact with a variety of other personal factors to shape the perception of the consultant in turn affect the way client and consultant interact. Organisational politics impacted upon the consultancy throughout in ways which were unpredictable and often highly significant. Finally, the studies show that the consultant needs to be aware of the potential barriers to engagement which the consultancy process can set up. Both clients would have been prepared to pay for the work to be done but the public sector client would have carried more of the work and paid for the softer, consultancy element first and foremost. There needed to be a recognition of where expertise lay and this is particularly important where the underlying theme is client choice.

To summarise how YOME worked in the two client settings I would say that first impressions of the Model were very positive and both clients felt that it was not over–academic but allowed them to draw on the management literature to good effect. They perceived it as systematic and, although it could be amended to clarify the staged process, it would serve well in future similar studies. The clients and I found that the number of options in the Model is both a strength and a weakness because of the great choice it gave but the time it took to make the choices. The fact that the studies involved researching staff views gave the studies credibility and stimulated reflection about the organisation. However, carrying out such a study involved a major time commitment which is hard to sustain for the full length of the project. The Model needs to be very well-presented and some minor changes will need to be made to the computer presentation and the supporting handouts to ensure ease of use.

These findings arise directly from the work with the two clients but in their turn they raise wider questions concerning choice-based models in general; the distinctions and overlaps between action research, evaluation and consultancy and it is to these which I now turn in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DOING ACTION RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter draws together the threads of my thesis, commenting on the connections with the literature and broadening the discussion into wider areas. As the discussion progresses I include the contribution the study has made to the literature in these fields, the limitations of the study and the areas for future research. Chapter 6 includes reflection on the process of action research and the complexities of carrying out consultancy in the context of the action research.

In the course of carrying out this work I have used action research as a methodology and taken the debate forward by replicating in the consultancy the good practice which Action Research (AR) advocates. Essentially, my consultancy incorporated self-reflection, inclusion and review in the way that AR does. So, although I have been using consultancy as a means of exploring evaluation using the learning organisation model, I have been doing so in a way which is consistent with research. I have, therefore, avoided the potential criticisms which could come from the typical consultancy method where there is little room for self-doubt or recognition of a need to admit when things go wrong and to change approaches.

Perhaps what I am saying is that good consultants should draw on the AR methodology in order to be honest, rational and ultimately more useful to the client. What is more, the choice-based system which I have used seems to me to reinforce that approach by recognising that the consultant does not have all

the answers, merely a series of questions and a structure for facilitating change which the client must make themselves.

The chapter takes the following structure: I first comment on the process of carrying out action research as I found it, particularly reflecting on the messy reality of the classic spirals. I then go on to consider learning models, their universality and usefulness. I then reflect on my positionality issues and the importance in carrying out this particular action research study of my own skills, personal world view and place in the community and the complications of insider and outsiderness. I then reflect on the achievement of inclusion through consultancy and action research: how possible is this in the political climate of organisations? Finally comes a key discussion of choice-based models where I not only reflect on what happened in the research to confirm my original suppositions that choice-based models were effective but also broadens into a discussion of my realisation that these approaches appear repeatedly in my other work.

Action Research Spirals

The two consultancy cases represent studies within the action research. One analogy, already referred to, to explain this is that the consultancy studies sit within the action research like Russian dolls one within the other. In setting out to do this I had what seemed clear ideas of what I was aiming to learn but actually I learned something which came unexpectedly and was not part of the intention in carrying out the work: that was that the practical reality of carrying out a study like this is that the action research is essentially untidy.

Despite Elliot and other authors advocating a systematic process of design, action and review; I found that in practice the spirals cannot be so neat. This is, in part, because I was carrying out two studies in parallel with each other (see Appendix 2). The learning from one was not expressly designed to lead the other but there was an inevitable and largely beneficial crossover of ideas and approaches between the two. To be in line with the tidy planning the action research literature advocates it would have been logical to carry out the two studies sequentially but the reality is rarely so straightforward. Nevertheless the stages of the process do matter because they require the researcher to stop and reflect as the process progresses. The thinking of those involved does develop over time. This was why the questions asked in the interviews reflecting on the action research changed as the work went on (See Appendix 4). They had to reflect the point I was at in each spiral. The literature recognises that the stages overlap and plans are reconsidered with experience (Kemmis and Wilkinson in Atweh et al 1998). My experience is that the action research process consisted of a whole series of small spirals each of which fed in to the next and informed the complete understanding of the processes which were going on. The fact that it was not tidy does not invalidate the approach as long as the steps are followed with reflection and amendment of the approach to take learning into account.

The experience of carrying out the action research was complex and the interlocking nature of the three studies (two consultancy studies for the clients and my own research) often meant that I had to disentangle ideas from each but also see how the one informed the other. There was no obvious pattern so that makes it a really hard process to do and to explain but it's also a better process because pausing to reflect on what was happening helped my learning about consultancy too. Self-awareness and constructive evaluation

are essential to an effective consultant. In a sense it could be argued that action research is a useful paradigm for consultants to adopt. This would perhaps enable them to counter the stereotypical view of the consultant as arrogant and self-important. By honest self-reflection and action to address unproductive approaches, consultants can improve their practice and enhance the personal relationships which are so essential to their effectiveness.

However, the consultant must appear confident and must convince the client that his or her skills are of value. These are issues to which I return shortly but which are key to drawing on the valuable experience of action research to inform the consultancy. Whilst self-reflection is valuable, there is a game to be played with the client. Reflective practice has to be tempered with self-confidence and the ability to convince the client of your skills.

In effect, action research is like any other research in the sense that intended approaches inevitably come up against unexpected reactions and it will be amended as it progresses and improved on reflection. It is an essentially iterative process which has enormous strengths and is, as a result, real and grounded not purist and detached from reality.

Learning Models

Throughout this work and in conducting the action research with the clients I used the term the learning organisation as a catch-all phrase for a range of models and thinking which is of universal relevance to organisations and which I believe to have the potential to be beneficial to clients for my own consultancy. There are, essentially three sets of interrelated thinking here. Firstly there is the literature on the learning organisation (Senge 1990, Pedler

et al 1997, etc) which is accessible, attractive and based on the experiences of consultants who attempt to apply those ideas with clients. Organisational learning (Argyris and Schön 1996 etc) is perhaps less well-known in the business world and more academic and theoretical. From the world of computing and management science the knowledge management literature represents the third strand.

In my research it was very clear that it was the literature on the learning organisation which was perceived as universal and transferable into different contexts. This was an idea which had an instant attraction for both clients. The fact that these ideas derive largely from the consultancy practice of the authors rather than from what could legitimately be called research does not, I feel, negate its value. In using the product of consultancy expertise one should be cautious about its findings because the work has been done in a commercial setting and there is a pressure on the authors concerned to talk up their efforts with a view to establishing further clients and contracts. Nevertheless, these authors are in close and repeated contact with clients who are seeking to improve their organisations and apply the models which the consultants espouse. This, in turn informs the thinking of the consultants and enables them to take their ideas forward. The practice feeds the theory and the models are enriched through the interaction with the clients.

Personal Issues in the research

Positionality is a core concept in relativist research and must be considered here. My position as an educational researcher working in a Business School where consultancy is an important activity, had an impact on my approach to the research. I had to consider my position with a foot in the educational

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research camp working to a supervisor and a Department with one set of values and a foot in the Business School camp with a somewhat different culture. It was for this reason that I set out to create a consultancy tool which could become a product of the Business School and part of the offerings of the Corporate and Executive Portfolio of staff. This was never a requirement for me as an employee of the School but it was a logical outcome of the work and a means of making practical use of the doctoral study. My personal development as a student on the EdD programme was somewhat separate and aside from this work experience. As the Business School was going through very difficult times and experiencing an absence of effective leadership and management over the four-year period of the EdD, I was never placed under pressure to deliver to any target, commercial or otherwise within the EdD research. The pressures upon me to bring in commercial work were met by other means and my line manager either chose not to require a commercial return on the research or simply overlooked the fact that I was doing consultancy without remuneration to the School. As a result I was able to carry out the consultancy studies and test the value of YOME without charging the clients at the Business School's usual commercial rates. This was in keeping with the value system predominating at the other University because it enabled me to keep commercial considerations at a distance from the work and, therefore, its conclusions. This, I feel, improved the validity of what I was doing and enabled me to ask for the reflective interviews as a quid pro quo for doing the consultancy studies for them without a charge.

One of the key issues in action research is that it essentially involves the participants in the object of study. I was an insider in the Business School which was intended to be the location of the final product of the research process. Ostensibly this made me an insider in the research but the nature of

the organisation was such that this work never felt part of the mainstream of the School's work. I had the personal support and encouragement of a number of individuals within my own University with whom I could explore ideas and offload my concerns about completion. I also made presentations to colleagues in lunchtime seminars and obtained very valuable feedback in the process. But in the deeper sense which Action Research implies, because my EdD research was peripheral to the work of the Business School I was not an insider in a piece of valued action research for my organisation. I was also not an insider in the two case study organisations the implications of which were that I had to spend a lot of time familiarising myself with them and trying to understand their motivations and approaches. However, the relationships I built with those who were insiders meant that in effect we were all participant researchers and this strengthened the process enormously.

A second personal issue in the research concerns my own approach to my work. It has been a feature of my life and career to date that I have become very involved in the lives of the people with whom I work and have sought to 'get under the skin' of my students, colleagues and fellow team members. This is not to say that I wish to pry into their personal lives but rather to understand the way they approach their work, their individual motivations and their learning styles. I have always been perceived as an approachable teacher and a person who is deeply committed to any project which I take on. In a sense this research is the pinnacle of my working in that manner. It is typical of my tendency to somewhat over-engage with my work and my private activities and self-impose stress and even occasional crises of confidence. This had its impact on this work and on reflection it has taught me a great deal about myself. At times there were feelings of uncertainty about my preferred model of consulting. It is a personalised process where you expose yourself and I

needed to make decisions about how to take it forward which reflected my own belief in my own knowledge and in the validity of the model.

The issue mentioned above of the consultant's need to present a self-confident face to the client was something of which I was well aware. I knew I had a good understanding of business models and the facilitation skills to make YOME work but my respect for the clients and my belief that they knew best about their own organisation made the process very much a collaboration between equals.

In a sense the fact that the model is choice-based sits well with these personal characteristics. Although I chose that approach because I believed it to be valid and suitable, it also accorded with my wish to engage deeply with the participants in the research because that is a fascination of mine. This approach enables me to satisfy my curiosity about the way others think and come to decisions. Hence, the interview questions (Appendix 4) reflected my personal style as they always centred in the interviewee's experience.

One side effect of this personal approach to the work was that I tended to get deeply involved with the cases to the exclusion of the action research. It became difficult to keep the two apart but that was essential because the clients wanted rather less of the deep self-reflection and rather more of the practical study with real consequences for their organisation. The mind-set was very similar i.e. reflective, questioning, research-focused rather than instant judgements but in the case of the consultancy studies there had to be a concrete outcome which could be used to good effect in the organisation.

These personal issues raise for me the possibility that my personal approach to consultancy is very gendered. This was not something which formed a core part of the study and I have made only limited reflections upon it as I progressed, particularly to do with the ways in which I worked with Heather Scott and Sue Drohan. However, I do feel that gender issues in consulting deserve further work. In particular, it would make an interesting study to apply the ideas of Carol Frenier (1997) ideas of Diffuse Awareness, The Quick of the Moment, Accepting the Cycles of Life and Deep Community to consulting activity.

Consultancy and inclusion

Both consultancy and action research can have the advantage of promoting inclusion (Atweh et al 1998, Schaffer 1997). By building partnerships to carry out the studies necessary to take the organisation forward, managers in the client organisation become involved in initiating and progressing change. This is infinitely preferable to change imposed from outside or from the top. Social justice comes from participation. Inclusion in the debate takes the learning organisation forward (Swain 1999, Nonaka 1996).

Fostering philomathic managers (Antonacopoulou 1999) who are appreciative of the need to learn and engage in a conscious and active learning process to improve themselves can be enhanced through evaluation. Evaluation studies can aid this process of involvement and reflection but really successful inclusion depends on the release of power by those carrying out the evaluation in the organisation. They will need to include people and respect their views. There is no room for the barriers created by hierarchy in a truly inclusive approach. There was a difference here between ACE and BEST. At

the former there were clear dividing lines between management and worker. At BSET there was a gradual transfer of management responsibility at higher levels in organisation. In that case there was more respect for the views of 'professionals' lower in the hierarchy.

Perhaps it is difficult for all staff at all levels in the organisation to understand and see their place in studies of this kind. But many of the factory floor respondents at ACE with whom I spoke face-to-face were certainly clear about their opinions and well-informed about the practices adopted in the organisation. Where they may have struggled, and I found this also at BSET, was in connecting theory and practice. The language of business models is intended to be generic and yet the organisations have their own jargon and named schemes and initiatives. For business models such as the learning organisation to have an impact on the organisation they must be clearly understood and placed in the context of the world in which the organisation operates. There is no point if it doesn't make a difference on the ground and for that to happen it must be expressed in sufficiently inclusive language to take all participants with it. Elliott (1991) conceptualises action research as resolving the issue of the connection between theory and practice because the reflective practice which is inherent in action research must be context bound in order to result in change. In a sense the upheaval at the Business School which coincided with this action research meant that action research was somewhat divorced from its context. As a result it could still go virtually unnoticed and YOME could fail to become a product of the School (or rather the newly restructured School of Business and Finance). Yet the consultancy projects in the two client organisations did have an impact precisely because they were inclusive and took into account the contexts of the client organisations.

Choice-based models

In preparing the YOME the key, underlying concept of choice leading to
greater effectiveness was paramount. This was well-supported in the literature
on evaluation and on consultancy and is in keeping with concepts of
empowerment which dominate the human resource management literature at
the moment (Buchanan and Huczynski, 1997; Morris et al, 1994; Stewart,
1994).

What is perhaps more interesting is that in all my work the choice theme
recurs. It has been influential on the development of a new project in the
Business School concerned with the creation of the 'DIVERSITY Enabling
Framework'. This is a choice-based model for employers to recognise the
need for and means of achieving an effective diverse workforce. The choice
theme also underpins my teaching which is entirely student-centred. My
approach to teaching is to learn to understand the students' motivations and
wishes so that, as far as possible, the learning can be deeply relevant to them
and they can choose their approach to what, how, when and even where we
study.

This is not only about participative research it is about ownership through
choice. As Wrennal (1998) points out

> the development of sound options has several advantages. It affords a
> choice rather than a rejection, allows management to perform its
> function of decision making, releases further information that was not

previously available, limits the introduction of unreasonable options and facilitates creative participation leading to an acceptable hybrid.

Wrennal 1998 p.1

I found this to be true but also found that the presentation of choices forced the client to be more reflective and systematic which improved the rationality of their decisions. The debating of the options also enabled me to become attuned to the culture of the organisation, a factor which is so important in evaluation (Lewis and Thornhill 1994).

There is, nevertheless, a tension between client choice and the skills of the facilitator or consultant. If, as in AR, the consultant is committed to participative work, where do you set the boundaries? To what extent does the consultant allow the client to make what the consultant perceives to be a mistake. To some extent this depends on the confidence and determination of the consultant as much as the true place where expertise resides.

Probably the consultant sets the boundaries for participation because they have the experience of using the consultancy model and providing their knowledge for the client. I provide structure, safety, efficacy within that choice system. My expertise lies in steering them through my model which I know so well to give them choice. However, in a choice-based model the client is making its own choices. The logical conclusion of this is 'why do they need me?' Choice leads to engagement, empowerment etc but facilitation like mine constitutes structuring of choice. Eventually the consultant learns where to advise against a particular course of action; knowing when to push for what you think is right and when to let go becomes the real art of the consultant.

The consultancy literature talks little about who (in the client organisation) should be involved with the research. In a choice-based model this is, perhaps, another choice for the client to make and I concluded that there should be a Who phase in the YOME in order to put the options clearly before the client. I found that the fewer people who are involved the consultancy study, the harder it is to implement change as a result of it. However, if very large numbers of managers are involved in making the choices about what is to be done it becomes difficult to achieve a consensus.

There is discussion in the literature about the need to leverage change through involvement and to keep the number of consultants to a minimum so that staff in the client organisation have to get involved (Schaffer 1997) but there is less on how the consultant chooses to recommend different participants. Schaffer recommends working with senior people who can most influence change and with large groups who can multiply the effort. He also believes that what he calls 'high impact consulting' comes from using and developing the skills of staff throughout the consulting process.

Blake and Mouton (1983) discuss the importance of establishing exactly who the client is:

> "Who is the client?" may appear to be an unimportant questions with an obvious answer. In reality, it is among the most critical, for when a consultant deals with the 'wrong' client the consequence is at best unproductive, at worst, destructive.... The real client is that individual, group, or relationship in which change is expected to occur.
>
> Blake and Mouton 1983 p. 16

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It was my strong instinctive feeling when beginning the consultancy studies that it was important to involve a wide range of managers in what we were doing in order to spread ownership. I was also aware (and the literature supports this e.g. Blake and Mouton 1983) of the importance of the involvement of senior managers in the process. However, there are key difficulties with that. In particular, when managers are busy it is all too easy to leave something to the 'champion' who is advocating it and has enthusiasm for it. Even when intentions are good, there will always be other demands on people's time and in a sense, this kind of work is always going to be in additional to the operational demands made upon staff. To apply Blake and Mouton's recommendation for identifying the real client as that individual, group or relationship in which change is expected to occur; where the clients' objective is to develop the learning organisation, it is the whole organisation which needs to change and therefore the client is the whole organisation.

The problem for the consultant using a choice-based model is, when to accept that working with just one or two people will simply have to suffice. Knowing when to accept this is a personal skill which comes from reading the situation carefully and recognising when your view cannot prevail. There comes a need to help prepare the handful of people you are working with to be the agents of change in the organisation and to raise awareness of the study and its findings so that implementation of recommendations will go ahead.

Where did expertise reside? Does the client organisation really know what their problems are and what needs to be addressed? My own research suggests that there needs to be an internal study in the organisation to diagnose this. It is not enough to take the viewpoint of the champion of the consultancy process. However, even after such a study, the consultant and

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the client may have two very different views of the nature of the issues in the organisation. Blake and Mouton, in discussing what they call catalytic interventions recognise the importance of 'getting inside the client's frame of reference' and the effect this has on raising the client's interest in the work but they also point out that the problem definition formulated by the client, based on his or her feelings, is wide of the mark. If so, the consultant and client would be collaborating on solving the wrong problem. (Blake and Mouton 1983, p.288)

Essentially, what is happening here is a whole complex range of subtle learning processes. The client and consultant are learning from each other. They both learn from the interaction with other staff in the course of the study. The client teaches the consultant about their organisation and the interplay of characters in the plot which makes up their story. The consultant teaches the client about their models and approaches.

Contribution to Knowledge

My contribution to knowledge in the field of the evaluation of management development through consultancy forms the content of the next section of these conclusions. I will discuss two categories of conclusion: firstly, my contribution to the literature and; secondly, in the light of this my suggestions to others in working in the field of organisational learning and development, especially through consultancy processes.

My contribution to the literature is of three principle kinds. Firstly, I have developed a means of evaluating the impact of management development on organisations which is centred on the experience of the organisation and

which does not depend on invalid quantitative methods of dubious merit. It enables an effective analysis to be made which has value as a process in itself and which is capable of continuation once the consultant leaves the organisation.

Secondly, my contribution to the literature comes from breaking methodological ground in linking action research and consultancy together and thinking more deeply about what one can teach the other. In particular, action research informed the consultancy processes in my case study work and informed and enriched the consultancy process. Consultancy need not be so disparaged if it draws on the methodology of action research. The rich reflectiveness of action research which advocates a systematic approach to study involving the spiral of examination and reflection can be drawn upon to enhance approaches to consultancy. The contribution is not all one way, however. Consultancy can be a powerfully effective tool in building theory and this can, in turn, inform the action research process. The action research gave a firm justification for a reflective, considered process to take place. This research shows that sometimes the action research process can be an untidy one where the spirals are not clear cut and the stages of the research overlap and become conflated. This does, not, however, mean that the process is invalidated. There is still reflective learning taking place and experiences with one client can inform approaches with another. Where the consultant is honest about this messiness but still adheres to the principles of action research he or she will deliver a more convincing and thorough piece of work and one which centres in the experience of the client and provides the thoughtful, research-based view which eludes the busy manager.

The third area where this research contributes to knowledge in this field is in the exploration of the value of choice-based models. The idea to focus on a choice-based approach in this research came from the evaluation literature. As Wills (1993) points out the overriding requirement is for evaluation to be devised appropriately for the organisation's needs. Standardised approaches will produce standardised answers whereas methods which take into account the needs of organisations - in this case the design of the management development programmes - and evaluate on the basis of objectives, will obtain a much more valuable outcome. My approach was to take this a step further and set up a serious of choices in order to determine just exactly what were the needs of the organisations and the objectives they were setting out to achieve. Should an organisation just pluck its objectives out of the air or, worse still, have the consultant draw them up, how can either partner be sure that this is really the process in which they wish to be engaged? My approach recognised that even the process of agenda-setting needs to be structured, thoughtful and considered. As the earlier chapters attest, this is not a simple process and questions arise as to who should be involved in making the choices; setting aside sufficient time; reaching agreement without too much steer from the consultant and so on. Nevertheless, the engagement with the process is enhanced because of the possibility of choosing between options.

It is also my contention that the advantages to the choice-based process of consultancy are transferable into contexts other than just the evaluation of management learning. Choice-based models in management and consultancy more generally have great advantages over more prescriptive approaches. My own experience supports this and will form the basis of much of my future work.

So, in the light of this contribution to the literature, there are some suggestions I might make for other people. Firstly, to the consultants: offer choices in objective, method, reporting approach and next steps discussions. This will improve credibility, empower clients in the process, involve the right people and result in a more useful outcome for the client. As a result the consultant's work will be valued and the client will come back for more.

Secondly, to the clients: manage the consultants to take a more action research focussed approach. Unless you are convinced that they have the learning and the respect for your organisation to work in this way then get someone who can. Don't allow consultants to claim they know what is best. When a consultant is using a 'doctor' or a 'detective' approach as described by Margerison (1988), rather than a 'travel agent' approach where choices are inbuilt, then change consultant.

Conclusion

More importantly than anything, carrying out this research, I feel that I have learned about myself. Because I have adopted an approach which is in keeping with my personal value system, I have been comfortable with the processes but challenged in taking learning forward with the clients. As Megginson (2001) points out,

> ....pretty well all research (and especially, all research in social and management sciences) is about personal unfolding.... Autonomy is about the evolution of the self from an external reference point to an internal one; about the emergence of an ego."

Megginson (2001) p. 14

To me, this is the appropriate conclusion to a study of this kind. The action research was my attempt to contribute to a debate about approaches to evaluation and using the learning organisation concept to do this. The consultancy studies were my attempt to develop organisational learning with the clients and explore my own approaches to consultancy.

Finally, that learning develops our understanding of our identity is ultimately the greatest joy of a journey like this to the completion of a Doctoral thesis. This work has contributed to my understanding of who I am and has changed me into a more thoughtful person and a better writer. It has been and illuminating journey and a worthwhile effort. Now comes the time to apply my learning in new contexts.

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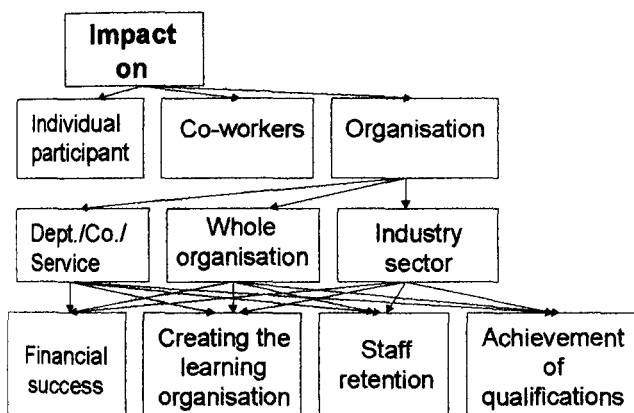
APPENDIX 1

THE YATES OPTIONS MODEL FOR EVALUATION
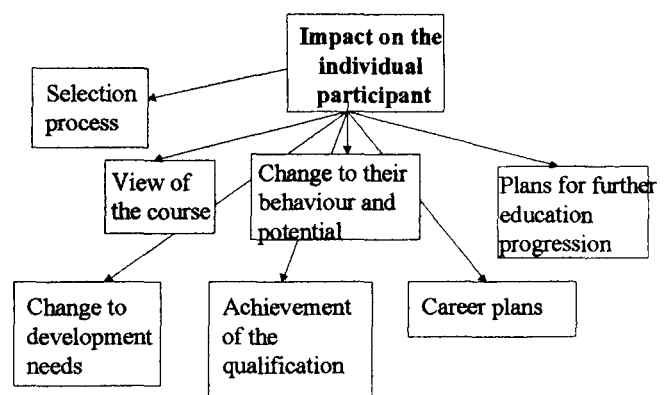
Yates Options Model for Evaluation

Yates Options Model for Evaluation - the four phases

- The 'What' phase
- The 'How' phase
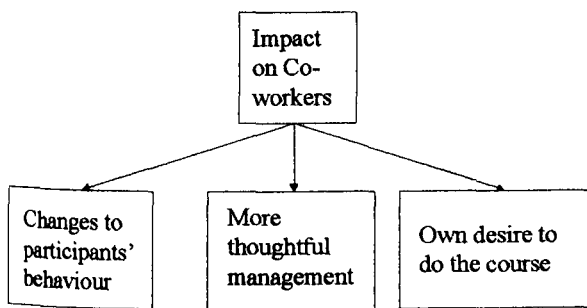- The 'Results' Phase
- The 'Action' Phase

The 'What' Phase

```
Impact on
    ├── Individual participant
    ├── Co-workers
    ├── Organisation
    ├── Dept./Co./Service
    ├── Whole organisation
    ├── Industry sector
    ├── Financial success
    ├── Creating the learning organisation
    ├── Staff retention
    └── Achievement of qualifications
```

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
Impact on the individual participant
    ├── Selection process
    ├── View of the course
    ├── Change to their behaviour and potential
    ├── Plans for further education progression
    ├── Change to development needs
    ├── Achievement of the qualification
    └── Career plans
```

The 'What' Phase (cont.)

```
Impact on Co-workers
    ├── Changes to participants' behaviour
    ├── More thoughtful management
    └── Own desire to do the course
```

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
Creating the learning organisation
    ├── Aggregating appraisal data
    ├── Measuring against objectives
    ├── Measuring against accepted definitions of the learning organisation
    ├── Best Value Performance Indicators
    ├── Measuring one department's performance against another
    └── Measuring against 'what our managers should be like'
```

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
                Measuring
                 against
                objectives
         /      /    \        \
   Of the   Of the  Of the   Of the
 organisation team  individual training
                                intervention
```

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
                Measuring
              against 'what
              our managers
              should be like'
        /       |        |        \
 Industry/sector |        |      Profession-
   standards     |        |       defined
            Management  Organisation- standards
            Charter     defined
            Initiative  standards
```

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
           Measuring against
               accepted
            definitions of the
                learning
              organisation ──────→ Business
          /        |        \       Excellence
 Pedlar, Burgoyne &          Allee's
 Boydell's 11               Knowledge
 characteristics of the      Types
 learning company
            Senge's model of
             the learning
              company
```

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
            Pedlar, Burgoyne and
            Boydell's model: the 11
            characteristics of a learning
                 organisation
```

• A learning approach to strategy

• Participative policy-making

• Informating

• Formative accounting control

• Internal exchange

• Reward flexibility

• Enabling structures

• Boundary workers as environmental scanners

• Inter-company learning

• A heaving climate

• Self-development opportunities for all

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
                Verna
               Allee's
              Knowledge
                Types
```

• Creating
• Sustaining
• Sharing
• Renewing

The 'What' Phase (cont)

```
             Senge's model
             of the learning
                company
```

5 skills or disciplines needed to develop a better learning organisation:

• team learning
• personal mastery
• mental models
• shared vision
• systems thinking

The 'How' Phase

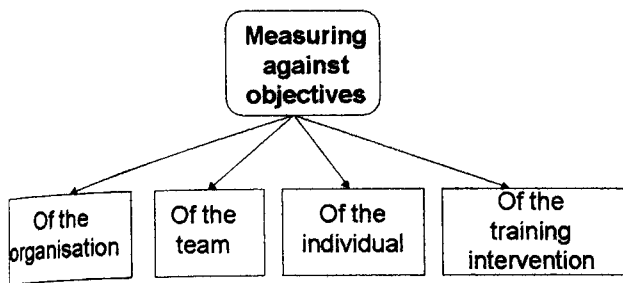# The 'How' Phase (cont)

The 'How' Phase (cont)

The 'How' Phase (cont)
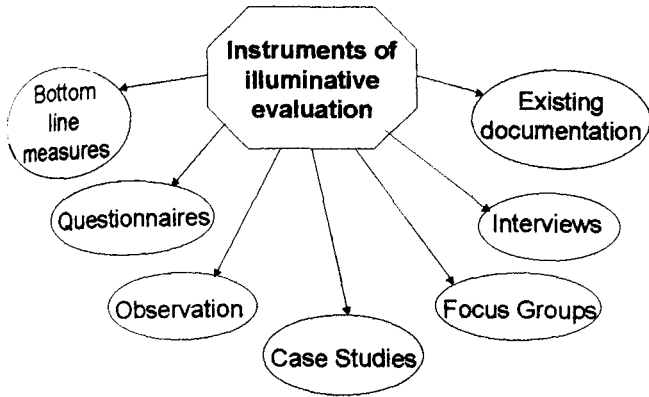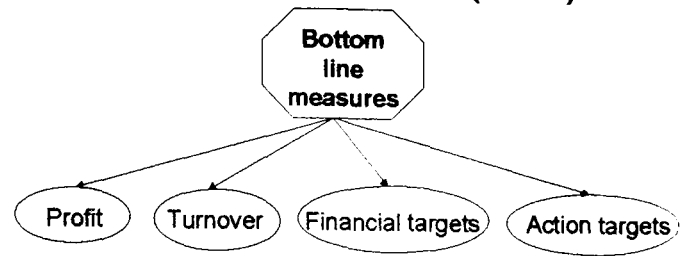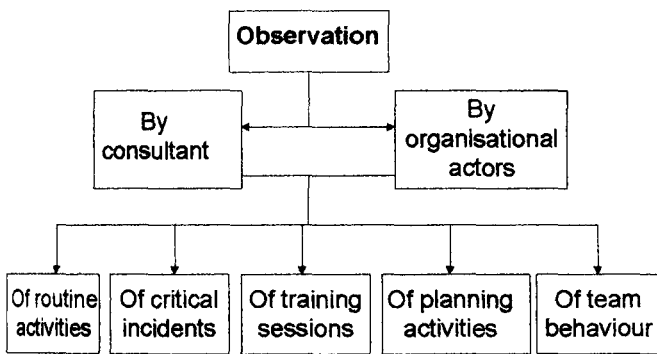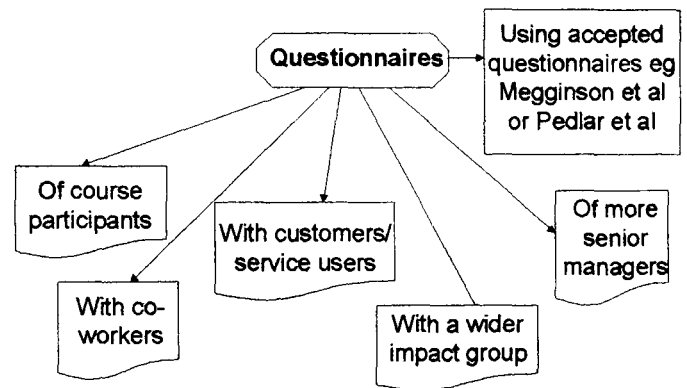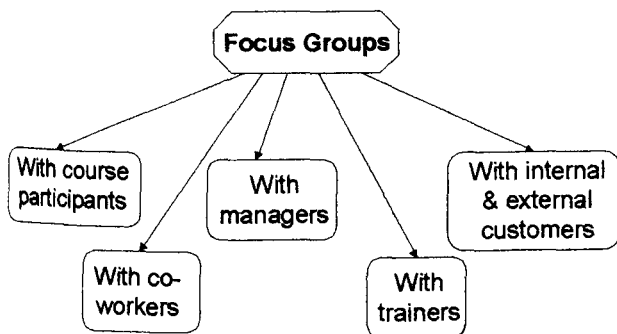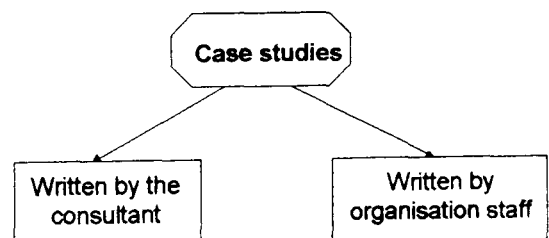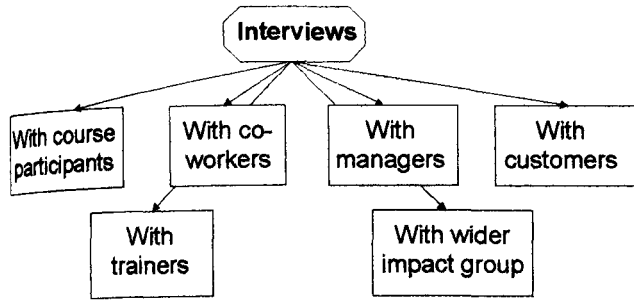

The 'How' Phase (cont)

The 'How' Phase (cont)

The 'How' Phase (cont)

Interviews

- With course participants
- With co-workers
- With managers
- With customers
- With trainers
- With wider impact group

The 'How' Phase (cont)

Existing documentation

- Descriptions of programme
- Evaluation sheets and reports
- Financial statistics
- Performance management/appraisal records
- Management development strategy documents

The 'Results' Phase

Findings

Models → Interpretation ← Alternatives

Presentation

- Report
- Oral Presentation
- Journal article

The 'Action' Phase

Interpretation

- Consultant's recommendations
- Organisational recommendations
- Collective action planning

Implementation

Review six months - one year later

Appendix 2 – Schedule of interactions and interviews

CLIENT	DATE	RECORD NUMBER	TYPE OF INTERACTION	WITH WHOM?
ACE	12th April 2000	AROI 1	Initial meeting with client	Sue Drohan, HR Director
ACE	4th May 2000	AROI 2	Choices meeting	Sue Drohan, Alan Trippier and (later) Rob Drohan
BSET	5th May	BROI 1	Initial Meeting	BSET Management Team
ACE	9th May 2000	AROI 3	Choices Stage	Sue Drohan
ACE	18th May 2000	AS1	Telephone Interview re the Action Research	Sue Drohan
BSET	19th May 2000	BROI 2	Choices stage	BSET Management Team
BSET	21st May 2001	BH1	Telephone interview for the action research	Lesley Hepworth, Senior Adviser
BSET	22nd May 2001	BS1	Telephone interview for the action research	Heather Scott, Chief Adviser
ACE	31st May – 1st June 2000	AROI 4	Interviews for consultancy study	20 staff at all levels
ACE	1st June 2000	AT1	Telephone interview re Action Research	Alan Trippier
ACE	1st June onwards	AQ1	Consultancy study questionnaires sent, received and analysed	All staff
BSET	7th June 2000	BROI 3	Telephone call	Heather Scott's Secretary
BSET	June 2000	BQ1	Consultancy study questionnaires sent received and analysed	All staff
BSET	20th July 2000	BROI 4	Report Stage - Presentation of findings of the study	Full BSET Team at Staff Conference
ACE	22nd August	AS2	Interview re progress	Sue Drohan
ACE	18th September 2000	AROI 5	Report Stage – Presentation to ACE Board of Directors	5 Board members
ACE	20th September 2000	AROI 6	Long email interaction reviewing the impact of the action research and the study for the client	Sue Drohan
BSET	19th October 2000	BS2	Long Interview for Action Research – post-results stage	Heather Scott
BSET	17th November 2000	BA/D1	Long interview for Action Research – post-results stage	Will Andrews and Dorothy Smith – Senior Advisers
ACE	12th January 2001	AS3	Long interview re impact of the Action Research and the consultancy study	Sue Drohan

APPENDIX 3 – Example of a Record of Interaction

BARNSLEY SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS TEAM (BSET)

RECORD OF INTERACTION 1

DATE: 5th May 2000
STAGE OF RESEARCH: Initial meeting
PLACE: Burneslai Close
NAMES OF RESPONDENT: Richard Bisset, Lesley Hepworth, Dorothy Smith, Wil Andrews, Heather Scott and Nicki Elliot. Heather is the Assistant Director, School Effectiveness. The others (apart from Richard) are Senior Advisers. Richard is a CiT Adviser and was at the meeting to present something. He is not normally a member.
Length of meeting: one hour

Having asked to use BSET as a try-out organisation for the model and receiving a positive response from Heather I sent a brief summary (on file) to heather to pass round the team and they agreed to go forward with it. So today's meeting was an attempt to present the model to the team and to secure a plan for progressing the work.

I talked through my thinking on the model. The response was positive in that H. felt that they now need to have a more theoretical look at where they are having been in existence for a year and about to face their re-inspection. She feels that they now need to take stock of their internal management processes. D. also felt there was a lot they could benefit from.

H. feels it would be very useful to focus on themselves as l.o. - the way they operate is key. They now need to observe how people work together.

N. asked whether the jig-saw questionnaire (although it is in the 'How' phase) actually might help clarify the 'what' phase. I gave her an answer which suggested that they are connected but actually I think that was a product of her thinking that it was how to do the l.o. rather than asking what you are going to evaluate. She wondered whether it could be valuable to send out a quick and dirty questionnaire like that to get a feel for the point they are at and then go from there. To me that was pre-emptive and I felt they were rushing to the how before thinking about what they were trying to achieve.

There was then some discussion about making use of the School Effectiveness Team Day on 20th July. I felt that group (90 people) was too large for making the choices but it would be good for doing focus groups. The focus groups could consist of mixed groups or self groups.

They are currently planning to look at the Service Plan at that meeting but this could either complement or replace that.

There was a possibility of doing the choices with the Management Group but that would still be rather large. There then arose a lot of discussion about the nature of leadership needed in the organisation. Will and to some extent Dorothy felt that the lead needed to come from this group and that the choices themselves needed to be made by them. N. expressed the view that there was still a very real need for leadership from the top because they are still very new and people need clear direction. She felt that there are phases in teams and sometimes there is a need for a strong lead from the top. The big picture is still not set and people are not clear about what they are doing and how so they need strength at the top.

H. was pushing for a much more devolved, consensual style. This resulted in a broad-ranging discussion which I really feel is more to do with the subject of the research than how they are going to make the choices. Richard said that people perceive the top team to be running around fire-fighting all the time and lurching from meeting to meeting. he felt that they weren't really perceived as a team developing strategy. D. Asked Richard (as someone who is not part of the management team) to say 'at what point will the perception will be different'. After some intervention (including from me which I now regret), his reply was that when their diaries are less full and they can be reflective.

H. felt that there were gaps in the way they work as a team and that is part of what they need to look at. The orchestra analogy came back again. They are all playing their part but there isn't a clear lead from the front. Richard said that "the hymn sheet was not complete" so presumably they can't all sing from it.

H. also felt that the time has now come that people cannot continue to make excuses for not working effectively and carrying out their responsibilities. They have to develop proper line management and development of people. Everyone agreed.

I felt that a way forward with this was to recognise that all that this choice making stage is an agenda-setting exercise. In order to be seen to be taking a lead this groups can make the decisions bearing in mind what they know their teams views are. They can then go forward to gather opinion and develop the action phase.

So it was decided that they would do that and after great difficulty we agreed to have the choices meeting on 19th May (8.30 - 11.30) which is a meeting of the same group as today. A further meeting for 4.30 on Monday 26th June was arranged to discuss research tools that I would design following the meeting on the 19th.

Then to reassuring noises and thanks from everyone I left the meeting. As I was going our Richard was asked to introduce his item and his first point was 'well, this all seems very unimportant after that discussion.'

Information of use to research questions

1. How can organisations evaluate the impact of management development programmes on their organisation?

At the moment BSET has been in place for less than a year and some of the team have been here considerably less than that. In a sense the management development here is in the form of just doing stuff. Many of the team deliver training and development to teachers. Many attended our management development workshops and they may be doing things on their own. I probably need to know about anything else they have done/are doing.

They seem to know that they need to look at their internal approaches. They have been looking out to schools and over their shoulders to OFSTED. Now they need to turn inward.

2. Is the concept of the learning organisation a good way of cutting through the problems this presents?

Include a 'who' stage? However, the problem arises with relation to who should make the initial choices. who questions are already included in the 'How' stage. maybe I should just put a slide in on Who as part of 'What'. I also think getting commitment from them about what work they are going to do is very important in the how stage. This is obviously more the case now because I am not being paid but in the long term it will still be an issue.

I need page numbers on the slides and the handouts of the slides.

Leadership came up again (as it did at ACE) and I am wondering whether that should be incorporate into the 'What' phase. it is an essential ingredient to the l.o. - could it be a choice within that? Is it enough that it comes in to the l.o. accepted definitions.

I need to explain carefully that this model is about agenda-setting for the evaluation not choosing to act in certain ways and so there are overlaps where things seem to be part of other things e.g. the l.o. concept is all-embracing and incorporates objective-setting. So they are making decisions about what to look at now what is connected with what.

The model is being perceived as very complex. This is both its strength (because it stimulates so much discussion) and its weakness because it takes a lot of time to get one's head round. If I were to simplify it we

would lose a lot of its strength. But one way to simplify it might be to forget that it's about the evaluation of management development/o.d. and make it a tool for the evaluation of the progress of an org towards the l.o.

3. Is it best if the organisations do that for themselves rather than a consultant coming and doing it to them?

There was lots of positive body language when I was explaining the fact that it is for the org to make the choices. I also know that Heather is very keen on this and recognises that the process is far more important than the outcome.

Action

Still need to get their commitment to evaluating the model against the research questions.

Need to put page numbers into the model

Need to ensure that they do some of the work in the research phase.

Need to know more about any management development/o.d they have already done.

Reflection

This was a very different experience from that at ACE. First of all, there were more people there. This meant more different viewpoints although, surprisingly they were all keen on doing the model. The lengthy discussion on leadership styles required from the management team was sparked by asking about who should be involved with the choices stage. I am beginning to wonder whether there should be a 'who' stage in the model.

Whilst I think that the model can come into play at any stage, if they haven't done management development in a concrete way it becomes an assessment of the l.o. This is still valuable. Both organisations have immediately jumped at the idea of evaluating the l.o. This may be because of how I presented it but I think maybe not. This seems to be an instantly attractive concept.

Appendix 4 – Action Research Interview Schedules

The interviews carried out for the Action Research were semi-structured in nature. I began with a list of questions but in response to points made by the respondents I would ask additional questions and then return to the original list later.

This allowed for the possibility of learning about the clients' experiences in an iterative manner and was in line with the whole spirit of the exercise which was designed to engage with the clients' own understandings of the evaluation study.

I reproduce here the list of questions which I prepared in advance of the interviews which I carried out just after the Choices stage in the Model.

Post choices stage

1. If I hadn't proposed the evaluation we are now working on, how would you have evaluated the way your managers and your organisation are developing?
2. How do you think organisations know if they are developing their managers well?
3. What were your first impressions of the YOME model?
4. What importance did the inclusion of the learning organisation in the model have on your view of the YOME model?
5. What are your general feelings about the process so far?
6. What do you currently feel about the four phases of the YOME model?
7. The model gives you a lot of choices. How do you feel about that?
8. Would you prefer for the consultant to give you more answers?
9. What problems do you have with the process?
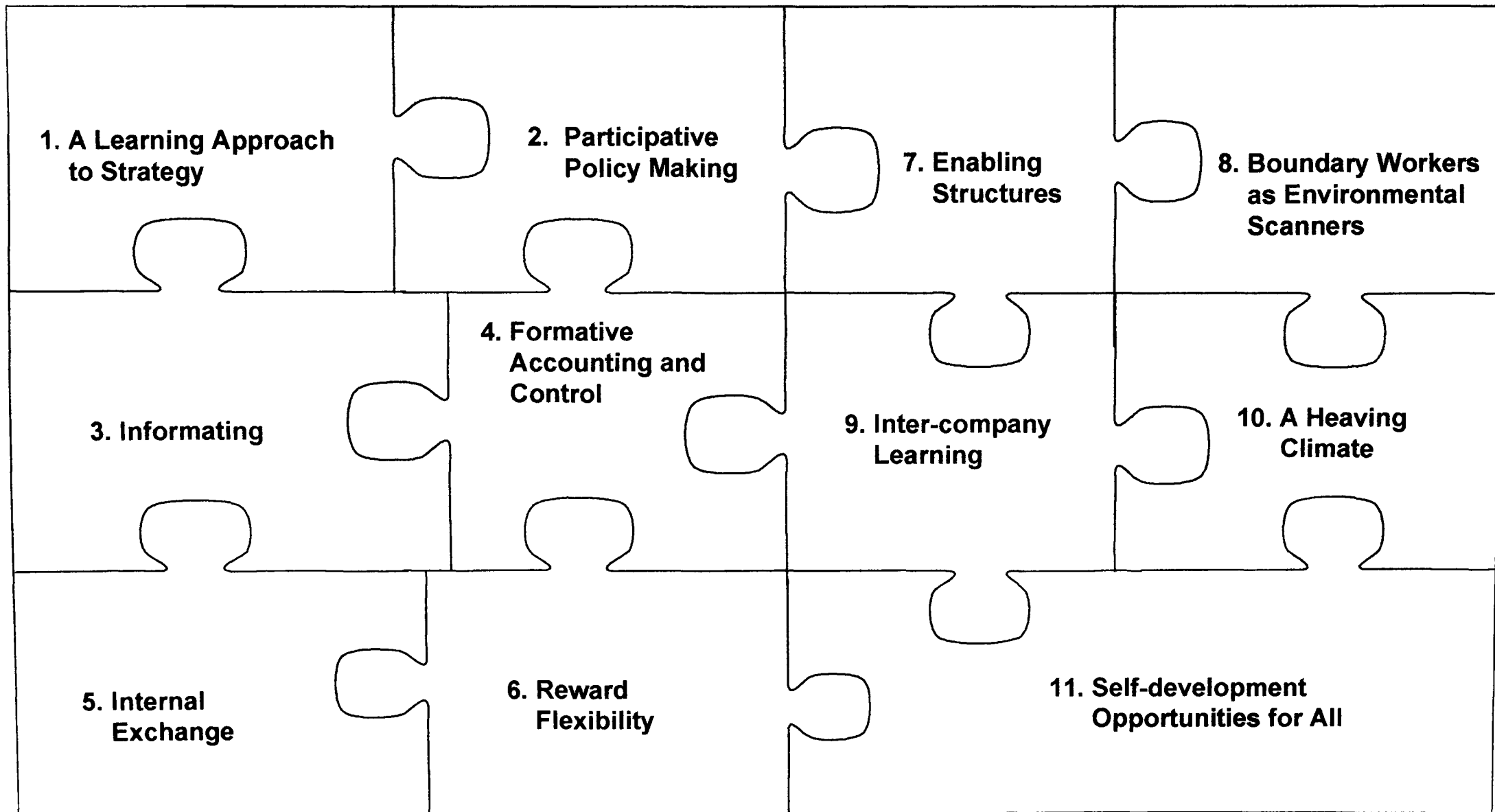10. What different choices would you have made if you had had to pay the costs I gave you?

APPENDIX 5

JIGSAW OF THE LEARNING ORGANISATION

As developed by Pedlar et al 1997.

"The Learning Company: A Strategy for Sustainable

Development"

Jig-saw of the Learning Organisation

Pedler et al1997

1. A Learning Approach to Strategy	2. Participative Policy Making	7. Enabling Structures	8. Boundary Workers as Environmental Scanners
3. Informating	4. Formative Accounting and Control	9. Inter-company Learning	10. A Heaving Climate
5. Internal Exchange	6. Reward Flexibility		11. Self-development Opportunities for All

Appendix 6 Scale of charges for Yates Options Model for Evaluation (YOME)

Research Method	Including	Cost
Full day discussion with key stakeholders	1. Present the model 2. Explain appropriate theory within the model 3. Make choices 4. Raise awareness of the concept of the learning organisation amongst the group 5. Provide supporting materials for retention by client 6. Provide consequent summary of decisions made	At client's premises: £1000 + expenses At Sheffield Business School: £1,200
Project Management	1. Ongoing meetings to plan and amend research as it continues 2. Keeping all parties appropriately informed 3. Keeping client aware of emerging findings	£500
Bottom line Measures	1. Identification of appropriate documentation 2. Access agreements 3. Analysis 4. Interpretation of meaning	£500

Questionnaire design and use	1. Design of questionnaires 2. Agreement with client and any necessary revisions 3. Receipt and recording of results 4. Interpretation of meaning	£1,000 per 30 respondents or up to 30 design process alone – £200
Observation	1. Planning who to observe 2. Conducting the observations 3. Taking notes and writing up afterwards 4. Audio or video recording as desired	£450 per day of observation
Case Studies	1. Identification of appropriate authors/cases 2. Preparation of framework of case study 3. Writing	£300 per case study
Focus group design and use	1. Design of structure 2. Inclusion of appropriate people 3. Facilitation of the discussion 4. Additional observers 5. Interpretation of meaning 6. Audio or video recording as desired	£450 per half day focus group
Interviews	1. Identification of suitable interviewees 2. Design of interview schedule 3. Setting up of interviews 4. Conducting interviews 5. Notes and writing up	£300 per interview depending on length of interview
Existing documentation	1. Identification of appropriate documentation 2. Analysis 3. Interpretation	No additional charge

Appendix 7 Copy for Promotional Leaflet

OPTIONS MODEL FOR EVALUATION

A Brief Introduction

Is yours a learning organisation?

Is the investment you have made in management education and development changing the organisation?

Is your training effort really worth it?

Can your organisation keep pace with change and sustain a viable future?

These are questions which may be prompted by demands to cut costs. Training and development sometimes seems the easiest budget to cut.

This model helps organisations find a way to evaluate how well their investment in management training and development is working for them. It has a number of benefits over other evaluation approaches:

It recognises the fact that sometimes achieving lasting improvement comes as a result of factors other than T & D.

It examines the multitude of factors which go into making successful, creative learning organisations

It takes ownership of the evaluation out of the hands of the external evaluator and puts it under the control of the organisation

It provides a framework for decision-making on evaluation which can be transferred into an action plan

It allows choice and flexibility in the design of the evaluation

It takes views from all key stakeholders

It uses triangulation to confirm and illuminate the picture formed of the value of the development initiative

The Model

The Yates Options Model for Evaluation is a choice-making tool where organisations work with a consultant to devise an evaluation of their management development programmes which is specifically geared to their own needs. The consultant works with the client to establish the focus of the organisation's concern and devise a set of approaches which are both effective and cost conscious.

Choices are made about:

- What will be investigated – the 'What' phase
- How it will be studies – the 'How' phase
- In which ways the findings will be interpreted and presented – the 'Results' phase
- And how the organisation will progress from there – the 'Action' phase

Modern organisations face increasing demands upon them to perform to higher and higher standards. To meet these challenges they must be competitive, energetic and self-sustaining. Organisational learning is a key to unlock the potential of your people. Why not see how far you are down that very desirable road?

If you would like to know more about the Options Plan for Evaluation, please contact Jacqueline Yates at Sheffield Business School's Corporate and Executive Portfolio. J.M.Yates@shu.ac.uk

Appendix 8

ACE Conveyor Equipment Ltd - Organisation Chart

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                          Rob Drohan
                        Chief Executive
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| Sue Drohan HR Director | Simon Drohan Engineering Director | D E Beedall Finance Director | B J Crangle Non-executive Director |

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                   Regional Managers          Finance and Administration Staff

                   Vulcanisers and Engineers
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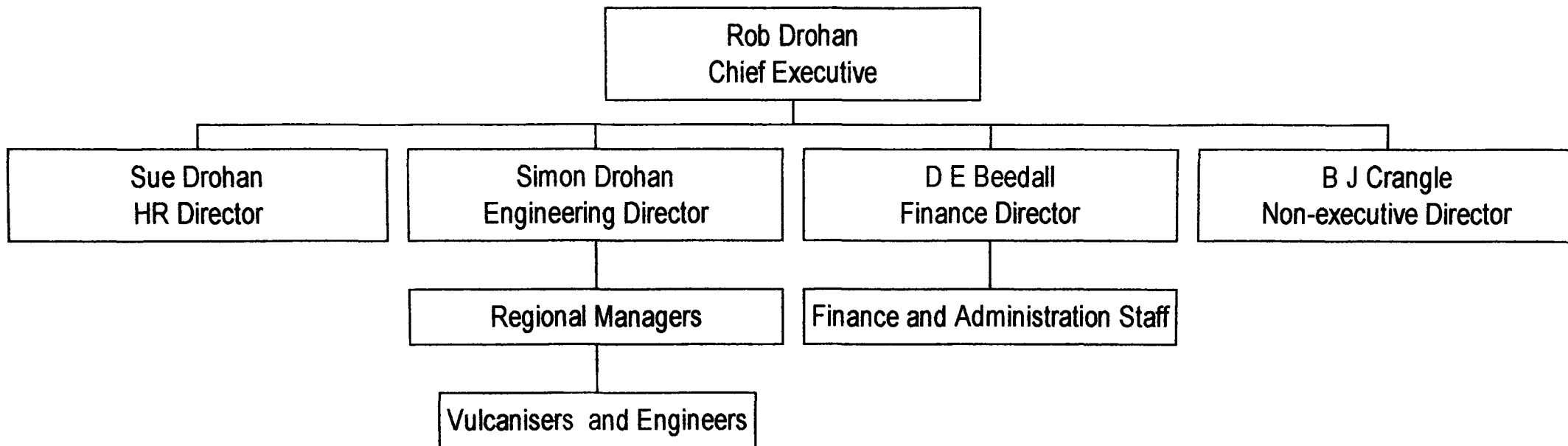
Appendix 9

Barnsely School Effectiveness Team Organisation Chart

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Heather Scott             │
│            Chief Adviser             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                    │
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ School Effectiveness Strategic Plpanning Group │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                    │
        ┌───────────────────────────┐
        │ School Effectiveness Managers │
        └───────────────────────────┘
                    │
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Advisers with project responsibilities	Advisers with project responsibilities	Advisers with project responsibilities

Admin Staff	Caretaking and Cleaning Staff	Kitchen staff