UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Using Creative Holism to inform new partnerships as a component of responsivity in the FET sector

By

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DECLARATION

I, Stanley George Hardman, declare that

- The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
- This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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**DEDICATION**

To

Yvonne

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Abstract**

I see my research as an exercise in critical systemic practice, expressed as Creative Holism, an approach to organisational research in complex problematical situations attributed to Jackson (2003; 2006), which informs my living theory, attributed to Whitehead (2008), of educating professional practitioners. I make the argument that my personal understanding of my role as a university lecturer includes a strong element of being an agent of transformation in that I am not merely conveying knowledge about a field or about a profession but am, in a sense, an embodiment of that knowledge. Moreover, I take ownership of the direction, focus and biases in my own knowledge and research because they are part of who I am and are a result of my limited perspective. By way of example, I provide a rationale for and inform a professional identity construction, namely new partnerships. I consider this within a context, namely students involved in a particular study in Further Education and Training (FET) who happen to be college managers. The concept of new partnerships and the linked leadership construct of connective leadership are applied to this cadre.

This research is also located within the ontology and epistemology of critical systems thinking and draws on the Creative Holism advocated by Jackson as a methodology. Moreover, it defines living theory as a systemic methodology and locates it within the Creative Holism typology of systems methodologies. My thesis adds to our examples of the application of Creative Holism. It focuses on the institutional problem situations in which the FET managers are situated, especially as they do or do not focus on partnerships within their professional thinking. I use systems methodologies, within the Creative Holism framework, to inform those situations, and use a particular combination of methodologies within a critical systems rationale. In particular, I suggest that critical systems thinking provides a vehicle for my exploration of my living theory, especially as I elucidate my own thinking about various expressions of institutional life and the reality that such life for the individual can be liberating or confining and repressing. My broad value position is that organisational life should always hold out the possibility of living out one's humanity with dignity and performing a worthwhile purpose in society. While I realise that for many, this is not their lived reality, it remains my espoused aspiration and a driver in and for my own work.

In considering the work attributed to FET Colleges, I engage with new partnerships to provide a theoretical framework and refine this to focus on the strategic partnership capabilities and potential of FET Colleges. In doing this I integrate new partnerships as a field of study with critical systems thinking as a vehicle through which to investigate partnerships and build our knowledge of social

partnerships. My purpose is to improve my understanding of social partnerships as it relates to FET and improve my practice in facilitating curriculum to FET practitioners.

In using critical systems thinking, I use Soft Systems Methodology to draw up a set of recommendations and thereafter use Viable Systems Modelling to suggest a framework for engagement for improvement in the partnership capacity of the FET Colleges.

# Contents

**List of acronyms**

| | |
|---|---|
| AsgiSA | Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa |
| BBBEE | Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment |
| CAS | Complex Adaptive Systems |
| CRP | Complex Responsive Process |
| CSM | Critical Systems Methodology |
| CSR | Critical Systems Research |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| DoL | Department of Labour |
| FET | Further Education and Training |
| FETMIS | Further Education and Training Management Information System |
| GEAR | Growth, Empowerment and Redistribution |
| IPN Later IebPN | International Partnership Network |
| | International education business Partnership network |
| JIPSA | Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition |
| PPP | Public Private Partnership |
| PWBLF | Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum |
| NATED | National Technical Education Qualification |
| NCV | National Curriculum Vocational |
| NQF | National Qualifications Framework |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| SET | Social Exchange Theory |
| SETA | Sector Education and Training Authority |
| SVC | Societal Value Creation |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |
| VSM | Viable Systems Model |
| SSM | Soft Systems Methodology |

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**Glossary**

**Connective Leadership:** An emerging theory of leadership which is intended to bridge the gaps between the public, private and civil sectors and build an appreciation of the need to work collaboratively to engage with the deeper problems being experienced in society.

**Creative Holism**: An approach to critical systems thinking as advocated by Jackson. It refers to the classification framework that he has developed over time in practice and provides a guide to the various systems methodologies which have been developed by various practitioners over time. What makes this concept, namely Creative Holism, is that he has attempted to address the critics of his earlier frameworks, whose criticism was directed mainly at the different paradigm assumptions that underpinned the various methodologies. In Creative Holism Jackson addresses this.

**Critical Systems Methodology**: This is a more broadly used concept which provides the framework of systems methodologies which takes into account the need to make considered choices in determining a methodology. It includes a comprehensive typology of research methodologies associated with the author MC Jackson and is linked to the tradition of researchers considered systems researchers. Creative Holism, as described above, is a recent manifestation of Critical Systems Methodology.

**Critical Systems Practitioner:** A person working in the field of organisational improvement who is making use of systems thinking methodologies within a multi-methodological framework, such as described above.

**Living Theory:** A foundational theory associated with Whitehead which promotes the view that the values base of the individual professional plays an integral part in their process of knowledge creation and application. It assumes the centrality of the client needs in professional practice and the responsibility of the professional practitioner to be deeply reflective of what they are doing and how their agency impacts on the well-being, personal growth and development of the client. While appreciating discipline based knowledge, it places the responsibility on the individual practitioner to internalise and interpret both holistically – considering the broader impact on society, and individually – considering the implications for the individual.

**Practitioner Managers**: This refers to the same people as I refer to as student participants above, but in their professional role as opposed to their student participant role.

**Practitioner Researcher**: This term I use generally to depict professionals who engage with their practice as they conduct research through the Leadership Centre. It usually implies the use of a form of Action Research or alternatively to the construction of knowledge of significance to their practice.

**Responsivity**: This word is emphasised in the policy literature on the FET sector. However, its interpretation is difficult to grasp. It does not mean merely a market driven approach where the FET Colleges need to respond to the market. It also has a political meaning within the context of the developmental state. Here it refers to an appreciation of the economic and labour architecture inherited from the apartheid state and the need to build inclusive communities, even in areas of obvious market failure and exclusion.

**Societal Value Creation**: A concept in the literature embellished and personalised in the research to inform the work of new partnerships and the articulation of the purpose of connective leadership. It includes an appreciation of a broad based value position indicating that which can be advocated and defended as being in the best interests of the majority within a democratic society, debated and defined within that society.

**Student participants**: I use this term to identify the group of managers from the various FET Colleges in the province of KwaZulu-Natal who were enrolled on the Post-Graduate Diploma in Management and who agreed to participate in the research project through making their assignments available and who participated in on-going conversations with me.

# Orientation

This is the story of a project within a programme. The programme is a university qualification in the form of a Post-Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management. The project is one intended to develop a cadre of managers drawn from Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges across the province of KwaZulu-Natal in order to enable them to confront the leadership and management challenges they face in their practice as they work during a particularly turbulent time within the FET sector. These practicing managers were selected by senior officials within the FET sector of the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department with the intention that they be trained to become leaders in change in their respective colleges.

The project was partially sponsored by the Danish International Development Agency and took place during the two years of 2009 and 2010. The agency sponsored the first year of studies and the participating colleges paid for the second year of studies for their staff members that were on the programme. The participants consisted of a group of 20 managers who were practicing in FET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal and who had been selected to further their studies. The Post Graduate Diploma for which they had enrolled at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) was customised to meet the needs of the specific clientele. The customising occurred firstly in the selection of appropriate modules from the range of electives offered, and then in populating those models with material and cases most appropriate to their context. The history of the particular programme was that it was designed to accommodate this form of application. For example, the module Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery can be applied to any institution, but the principles of systemic improvement, which is the substance of the content, focuses on the process of understanding underperforming systems and how to go about improving them.

This presented me, as an academic located within the Leadership Centre of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, with the ideal opportunity to articulate what I had internalised the purpose of the Leadership Centre to be, which is to bring academic rigor and the theory and practice of leadership development to bear on mainly South African organisational situations. The emphasis is placed on praxis – informing practice through research and informing research through practice.

I also saw the project as an opportunity to realise the declared transformation charter of the University of KwaZulu-Natal from which relevant extracts are quoted below. The transformation agenda goes to the heart of the social contract of the university, as reflected in statements drawn from the draft Transformation Charter of UKZN, received on the 3rd August 2010.

Staff are encouraged to embrace the notion of "socially and contextually relevant curricula," which "prioritizes the well-being and growth of every individual student" for the purpose of advancing "social transformation and redress", and providing "holistic education" which will "produce self-confident and socially responsible graduates, conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation". This research intends to sensitize a particular student group and myself to the "lived experiences of others" in which to "foster understanding and tolerance". It intends to create a space for reflection and the extension of the "boundaries of human existence", "in meeting the challenges of our times".

However, more than articulating the purpose of the Leadership Centre, and internalising the Transformation Charter of UKZN, I saw this as an opportunity for me to grapple with and attempt to articulate what living theory has come to mean to me. Simply put, this means developing an appreciative understanding of the challenges faced by students in leadership positions and seeking to explore with them innovative solutions based on the Systems Thinking and Practice literature with its emphasis on participatory practices. In particular, my intention was to seed the idea of new partnerships as a means to greater integration between each college and the communities it served.

The particular degree format I have chosen is that of a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) rather than a PhD. My reason for this choice is that a DBA is designed to place the emphasis on professional practice rather than being purely academic. However, I appreciate that in the minds of some that this might be a contentious distinction as a DBA requires similar academic rigor. The difference, however, in my opinion, is that the DBA qualification needs to be developed as a practitioner degree in order to focus it on meeting the institutional challenges facing leaders in South Africa at this time.

I align myself with the purpose of the project described above and position myself professionally as a virtual external consultant or analyst – words used in the systems thinking tradition to indicate the work done by someone contracted by an organization to provide a service in terms of institutional change. The process of change can be managed internally and externally – internally, by employees within the organization or externally, by bringing in a consultant with the necessary expertise. A third approach which is often used, however, is where the process goes through phases, blending both internal and external consultancy inputs over a period of time. By using the word virtual, I am clearly indicating that I was not directly contracted as an external consultant to the change process, but had the role of facilitating the participants' learning through the post-graduate diploma. As such, I was able to legitimately (i.e. in accordance with the approved programme and module templates) embed customised aspects into the course which provided learning opportunities for my students as internal change agents within the organisations in which they work. I base this on the fact that the selected participants were given the opportunity to participate on the course as an integral component of a project funded by the Danish Development Aid Agency to assist in the transformation of the sector, as described in the opening paragraph.

I make the following argument to justify my choice of the DBA qualification as opposed to a PhD. First, the practitioner dimension fits into the purpose of business administration and a DBA is intended to focus on research in and on professional practice. I therefore propose that for the nature of my work and my understanding of the work of the Leadership Centre, the more appropriate vehicle for my qualification would be a Doctor of Business Administration.

This confronts me with the need to justify my work as a professional practitioner. Using good systems thinking practice, I draw on a metaphor to assist with my logic. Many vehicle manufacturers these days make vehicles which they term "cross-overs." This means they are in between a sedan car and a rough terrain four-by-four vehicle and have features of both, which are designed to make them useful in both freeway and track driving. This compromise, however, comes with some limitations on both sides. These vehicles do not have the comfort and speed of a sedan or the rough terrain capacity of a robust four-by-four off-road vehicle. Their main appeal is their multi-purpose capability. Working in the

Leadership Centre has been characterized by a permeability of boundaries or cross-over spaces. At times, we working in the Leadership Centre have been criticized for not being academic enough and for not writing sufficient academic papers. At other times, we have been accused by clients as being too theoretical. This is where the work of scholars/consultants and their teams such as Checkland (1999), Checkland and Poulter (2010) and Checkland and Scholes (1990), Beer (1959, 1966, 1972, 1979, 1981, 1989a, 1989b) and Jackson (2000, 2001, 2003, 2010) provided invaluable cross-over space. The common ground that they all hold is that while the enquiry, rigor and research characteristics are essential in professional practice, these academic practices must not create barriers to working with real problems faced by practitioners in real time dynamics. It is in such a cross-over area that I have developed my own relatively modest space as a living theorist and it is where I attempt to bring together good scholarship, as embedded in the systems management tradition, with a personal democratic and reconstructive value position drawn from a critical appreciation of the transformation agenda in South Africa. For me, therefore, the FET colleges can become sites of organizational design and development, where a transformation of work competency can be included.

In the research that follows, practitioner managers drawn from the management echelons of the FET Colleges of KwaZulu-Natal were the participants with whom I collaborated to advance my learning about how partnership practice might be improved in the FET sector. In so doing I have attempted to express appreciation for the lived experiences of the participants, while at the same time holding fast to my personal or "living" interpretation of the policy documents and structural changes made by the state in promoting the agenda of transformation of the FET Colleges.

In the research, my living theory is informed by Creative Holism (Jackson 2003, 2006), an approach to formulating methodological choices about participatory engagement with people working in organisations who face complex problematical situations, and I portray my students as practitioner managers requiring an appropriate formal professional development experience. Embedded in my interactions with them has been an overt enquiry into the social purpose of the FET College, particularly with respect to the social value of a responsive organisational culture in the contemporary South African situation. On the assumption that this has significance for their professional and organisational identity, I

have included it in their Post Graduate Diploma in Leadership with the intention of providing a platform for professionals who move from the more technical practice of their profession to positions of seniority and management where a new knowledge platform is required, namely one of organisational leadership. In particular, I focus on how the FET colleges can contribute to regenerating South African society and the agency role that FET managers can play in this regard.  Participation in this qualification has been a shared experience, albeit nuanced by our different perspectives; theirs to be better managers and transformers and mine as a teacher, researcher and improvement facilitator. In this sense we share the envisioned charter of social responsibility, transformation and national development.

In closing this section, I suggest that one essential role for the contemporary university is to create an enabling environment for (post graduate) professionals to engage with research as a situated and personal knowledge creation process, with implied social value. Therefore, I remind myself of the preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

**PREAMBLE**

*We, the people of South Africa,*

*Recognise the injustices of the past;*

*Honour those who suffered for injustice and freedom in our land;*

*Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and*

*Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.*

*We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this*

*Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to –*

*Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;*

*Lay the foundations of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;*

*Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by the law;*

*Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and*

*Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.*

*May God protect our people.*

*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso.*

*God seen Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa.*

*Mudzimu thatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika.*

# Chapter 1

## Framing the Research

### Introduction

The purpose of this research could be perceived as being very simple and rather technical. It could be premised on the assumption that if social wellbeing is more prevalent in a society of high employment and that because South African FET policy promotes responsivity, as I will illustrate in Chapter 2, then in order for these educational institutions to move in this direction we simply need to enquire, "***How can FET College managers use responsive partnerships to contribute to lowering South Africa's high unemployment rate and thus enhance the quality of life***?" From a systems theory and practice perspective, however, I suggest that it that would be particularly naive to assume that it is indeed a simple question. To justify this point of view, it is necessary to situate the question and take into account the multiple stakeholders, the dynamic relationship interactions, and the personal and institutional learning processes, which will hopefully provide a framework for a more profound response. Systemic enquiry attempts to understand the inter-relationships and the multiple influences that determine human discourse and behaviour. This starts with my own professional identity and the nature and purpose of my engagement within the institution out of which I work. It moves to the professional identity and living professional experiences of the group of students who became participants in this real life situation, the institutions in which they work and the institutions which influence their work, and also includes the students and agents of employer bodies, who are in turn their own students. It incorporates the broader society in which we are all located, together with its myriad of social challenges, especially those linked to the economic impoverishment that accompanies under and un-employment.

It is for this reason that this research uses a systems thinking approach. It is about me and my work in a particular project as a "virtual consultant", working from my own living theory perspective. It is about the FET College staff members (participants) involved in the project as practicing managers. It takes into account the limitations brought about by the project itself – namely a taught Post-Graduate Diploma using a customised block release format. It

looks outside of the project for implications involving possible improvement strategies in which the participants can be involved. It is about the relational issues implied in improvement strategies, both within and without the colleges. It is theoretical and conceptual; about new partnerships as a form of strategic engagement. It is also empirical in the sense that it relates to real reflections and experiences as expressed in the written assignments and classroom and tutorial group discussions of the participants. Finally, all of the above are conditional on the interacting values, motivations and competencies of stakeholders.

On a reflective note, as I am nearing the end of my formal career, I consider it important for me to view my research as consolidating my thinking and practice as a re-interpretive exercise in self-understanding. While I do not pretend that I have a particularly successful career, I still think a self-expression of this type opens my living theory to scrutiny and critique, which might be of some help to others who find they are working at the interface of academia and leadership practice. During my career, I have reflected on various issues and have identified values, organisational change and social partnerships as being important to me in my interpretation of my contribution to my teaching and research. In the orientation, I indicated that this research reports on a two year teaching project in my practice as a lecturer and explained how I used a particular challenge that was presented as a research site. A formal qualification in the form of a Post-Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management was customised to meet the needs of a specific group and this exercise in formal professional development was presented as an action research project in seven modules. The participants were required to attend eight, week long contact sessions with the goal of developing their competency as Further Education and Training College managers. A particular problem they face, namely building greater responsivity in their colleges through building partnerships with stakeholders, most notably employees and institutions tasked with job creation, was used to focus the study. I saw the process as being embedded in my own living theory of professional activity and identity. Whitehead defines living theory as follows:

> "A living theory is an explanation produced by the individual for their
> educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in

> *the learning of the social formation in which they live and work"*
> (Whitehead, 2009, p104).

For me, this thesis is intended to focus on my understanding of my own learning and influence as an educator, as exemplified in my work as a Higher Education practitioner in working with FET College managers and in recognition of their own need to engage with their own learning in the process of personal and organisational transformation.

## The Research Problem

The problematical situation is that while Further Education and Training Colleges are seeking to define themselves as institutions of value in a democratic society, they are beset by a variety of challenges concerning their status in the education landscape, as is reflected in the literature and in the minds of the various stakeholders. This is preventing them from integrating into society and playing the intended transformational role anticipated in policy, which is to provide a continuous flow of labour into the labour market and aligned with labour market requirements. This problematic situation has a history going back into the apartheid educational architecture. Moreover, it is a situation where comprehensive, far reaching reformation has occurred and where great expectations of playing a significant role of getting young South Africans into work within a racially and gender redefined society are housed. In this context, management has an extremely important, but exceedingly challenging task to reposition the FET Colleges in the employment sector. This problem is manifested in the difficulties associated with the implementation of policy, the recurriculating of programmes and the retraining of staff, as well as the changing of governance frameworks with regard to the relative independence of the FET Colleges.

The research project fits into this context and is a manifestation of an attempt to bring about improvement. In particular, the research focuses on the need for members of the management staff to become agents of transformation, and explores the institutional challenges which impede this.

## The Research Question

Thus, I start by providing the main research question around which I have built my thesis. The question has already been posed above, namely "***How can FET College managers use***

*responsive partnerships to contribute to the institutional change required that will eventually contribute to their contribution in lowering South Africa's high unemployment rate and thus enhancing the quality of life*?" Clearly, the research rationale assumes an appreciation of complexity which realises the long term nature of societal transformation, but accepts the immediacy of personnel and institutional transformation as a primary step in this direction.

In determining the research questions, I have drawn on living theory and posed the above question by locating myself in it. Thus I ask, *"How can I, as an academic practitioner[1], engage with Further Education and Training College practicing managers during a formal qualification in order to inform organisational responsivity to engage with new partnerships in the sector, with the intention to enhance the quality of life of their students?"*

I compare this with the first, simpler question posed and, for me, my more complex question is more authentic because it takes into account my level of reflection and engagement, which moves beyond propositional knowledge, and also takes into account agency and the application of knowledge into practice.

I consider this question as important because it expresses and focuses my understanding of living theory. It refers to my agency – my role in actively engaging with the student participants as practitioner managers, an engagement which goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, but uses methodology to engage more systemically. It is a question which is important to me because it validates my professional work in which I have built the field of experiential learning for social partnerships, defined as new partnerships in my thesis, into the work of the Leadership Centre. I consider this as adding value to the professional students as it encourages them to merge the contextual application of the classroom experience into their everyday lived professional experience, thus enriching it through the new lenses of systemic appreciation at the interface of public, private and civil organisation interests and cultures.  In the same way that I have positioned myself as a virtual consultant within this research, I also have to envision a virtual client group, namely

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[1] I have described my role as "a virtual consultant" implying that although I am not consulting to the FET Colleges, I am assuming a virtual role which informs my work with the managers who are participants in the academic programme, with the intention of influencing their agency role in transformation.

the practitioner managers who are participating as student practitioners. While the situation has been guided by my values, it has been informed through their eyes, as expressed in their writing, conversation and reflection. I have, therefore, constructed questions that I believe, in the context of this research, would be valid questions if I was asking them as a representative of the sector. I thus, embed my primary question with the following three, which articulate my virtual representivity of the client group. The questions are:

- "How can I, as an individual, be fully true to self and add value to my society in the context in which I am situated through a greater appreciation of new partnerships?"
- "How can I, as an agent within an organisation in which I interact collectively and systemically with other agents add value to our society through greater appreciation of, and expertise in, social partnerships?"
- "How can I, as a leader in the sector in which I work, enable this sector to add value to the good of the nation through developing my capacity as a connective leader?"[2]

It will be noted that these questions are recursive and embedded within each other. They emphasise a construction of identity and purpose for the individual as professional, the organisation as purposive, and the society as cohesive and goal directed. However, in setting these questions, I have to acknowledge that they are an expression of my value proposition about new partnerships, and articulate value led critical systemic engagement with new partnerships. I therefore do not think that these questions can be imposed on people. However, they can be posed and expressed through my approach to my work as an educator. While I would love for this level of reflexivity to be "taught", I realize it is more likely to be caught through personal exposition and application.

I also have to acknowledge that in terms of being an exponent of living theory (Whitehead, 2008), I have grown in my appreciation and articulation of this concept. I have expressed myself differently along the way in the past as my learning continued to develop, drawing on Shön (1987) and his view of reflective practice, and on Senge (1990) and his view of personal mastery within the learning organisation, a position I have substantiated in my

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[2] In the initial presentation of the thesis the external examiner focused on these three questions as integral to understanding its merit.

paper with Averweg (2011). Whitehead manifests a deep conviction concerning the importance of the individual becoming emancipated from narrow "group-think" and convention and challenging the status quo if it is not dynamic in expressing and articulating values into practice. This is evident through the variety of theses he makes available through his web-site, which provides concrete expression of students with whom he has engaged and through whom he has furthered the process of living theory. Senge (1990) puts emphasis on how to engage with and enhance the learning processes within organisations. He has developed what he refers to as disciplines or patterns of behaviour that need to be built into organisations for the participants in them to develop the vision and mission collectively. He refers to personal mastery as one of these disciplines. Personal mastery is about internalising what it is you need to know and do in order to contribute to your personal goal achievement and endeavours to ensure that the organisation in which you work thrives through adapting to change. Shön emphasises the essential practice of reflection through which practitioners can reinterpret discipline based knowledge into practical and useful professional practice. In the work with Averweg (Hardman and Averweg, 2011), I drew on these thought leaders to provide a case study in practitioner research.

If the practitioner managers became dedicated to a living theory approach and made the above three questions their own, this could be a powerful learning modality for improving practice. In this particular case, the value would be FET colleges that are more integrated into society through new partnerships. These questions would become continuously recursive to them as they were faced with new challenges during the course of their studies. However, I have to accept that this is not possible for various reasons. Their values may be different to mine and they might not choose the living theory epistemology as a means of interpreting themselves and their work, preferring to take a more functional or even critical approach to their studies Therefore my position had to be one of being prepared to advocate and illustrate, and as best to "live" living theory, nuanced through the reality check of accepting my living contradictions.

Therefore, the three subsidiary questions need to be interpreted in the light of the main question.

"How can I as a practitioner engage with Further Education and Training College managers in order to get them to engage with improving their college responsivity through developing new partnership capacity?"

- "How can I, as an individual, be fully true to self and add value to my society in the context in which I am situated through participating in new partnerships?"
- "How can I, as an agent within an organisation in which I interact, collectively and systemically with other agents add value to our society through promoting and living connective leadership?"
- "How can I, as a leader in the sector in which I work, enable this sector to add value to the good of the nation?"[3]

In integrating these questions I am of the view that FET Colleges have a distinctive role to play in providing society with intermediate skills and that it is the responsibility of managers in those colleges to seek to align the work they do with the needs of the communities they serve. There is intrinsic value in employability and there is a dire need within South Africa for its extension. It is the FET College staff, institutions and sector that provides the context for these questions.

Thus, the question becomes nuanced and embellished within a living theory framework as it focusses on new partnerships, as indicated above. It is to this end that I suggest that the value of the FET Colleges is embedded in individuals and the organisations and institutions which they co-create in the social construction of learning through new partnerships. They are able to contribute within the broader society by adding value through not only providing individuals with livelihood skills, but by doing so in an informed way which links opportunities for employment with employable college graduates.

Thus, the research question becomes personalised through posing it within a living theory framework and a value proposition that growing awareness and capacity in new partnerships could have an impact on the social integration of the FET Colleges. Furthermore, through social construction of knowledge and identity, different people have different interpretations of what they experience in organisations, how they interact with

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[3] In the initial presentation of the thesis the external examiner focused on these three questions as integral to understanding its merit.

people in other organisations and how they interpret the different expressions of meaning and attitudes of fellow professionals. This creates a complex discourse.

## The Research Methodology

In clarifying the research problem, I need to make reference to the methodology I have decided to use in order to inform the research question. I have already indicated that the methodological framework is that of Creative Holism and that I see this methodology as being derived from Critical Systems Practice. Creative Holism proposes a four stage process (Jackson, 2003, p 312), namely creativity, choice, implementation and reflection, which assumes a systemic appreciation of the world and manifestations within it. The first basic premise of systems thinking is widely expressed as being appreciative of the interconnected nature of the world and that instead of always using a reductionist approach; it is also very helpful to look holistically. This means looking at the interconnected nature of events and the complex influences of the unfolding world around us. This interconnectivity, and the unpredictability that often accompanies it, are foundational to systems thinking. Because of this complexity, the second important premise of systems thinking to me is the fact that none of us is able to fully conceive the complexity around us and therefore only have partial and provisional understandings which makes up our perceptions of reality. Thus, systemic thinking is profoundly constructivist in its appreciation of the learning process. The third basic premise that I appreciate is that systems thinking appreciates that boundaries are of human construction, be they the boundaries of countries, disciplines or groups of people. In thinking of boundaries, our thinking takes on a political dimension in that we interpret and promote notions on inclusion and exclusion. The fourth premise is that in problematic human situations, which we refer to as messes, we need to find methodological approaches to engage people in improvement efforts. These four premises summarise my interpretation of the key pillars of systems thinking. It will be seen how these characteristics are embedded in the thinking I present about new partnerships and connective leadership.

It is in response to the above appreciation that the first phase of Creative Holism is creativity. Creativity is intended to find a key focus point which seems to be at the heart of the problematic situation. This is followed by choice – the choosing of an appropriate systems methodology as a dominant methodology, while recognising that there will be

dependent methodologies that might also be used. The third phase is implementation, which is the creation of specific change proposals, and finally the fourth phase is reflection, which is intended to extract learning for future reference.

In the chapter on research methodology, it will be seen how I describe Jackson's Creative Holism (2003) as a means to articulate Critical Systems Research. Within this approach, I am going to use a variety of defined methodologies. I am also going to locate living theory within the typology of systems thinking methodologies and justify this decision by showing that living theory can indeed be classified as a systems methodology. One of the methods I use is Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). It is a methodology which assumes that the human situations within which research problems are located are not clear cut and singular, but rather that problems are defined differently by the various stakeholders or actors in the situation. Soft Systems Methodology is designed to take into account that there are a variety of possibly equally valid perspectives which determine the nature of the problem differently. Thus Soft Systems Methodology refers to situations considered problematic or problematical situations, rather than clearly defined problems. Another word used as a technical term in Systems Thinking is "mess", which is another way of describing the same thing. I am also going to use Viable Systems Methodology (VSM), which serves a complementary purpose to SSM. VSM has been developed in order to facilitate the learning architecture of an organisation to improve communication and control mechanisms. Thus VSM is used to design improvements for the purpose of increasing responsivity.

## The Research Context

### The research setting

Social research does not happen in a vacuum; nor is it controlled in a laboratory. Rather the significance and meaning of social research questions are found in the context of their social construction. Thus, the research question needs to be couched within the FET system, taking into account the various themes that have become loosely woven into its present constitution. This begins by realising that education in post-apartheid (after 1994) South Africa has been totally reconstructed by the ANC led government. There is now an integrated system of educational provision and one Department of Education for the whole country instead of the plethora of Departments which typified the "separatedness" of

apartheid policy. However, this one Department operates through nine provincial departments of education.[4] The system has been divided into bands, namely the General, Further and Higher Education bands. The FET sector is situated after the nine grade years and is predominantly a three year band, incorporating grades 10, 11 and 12. It is followed by the Higher Education band associated with University education. FET Colleges exist alongside schools which also cater for FET band learners and have a distinctive historic trajectory.

## The research project

This research project occurred through my professional involvement with a group of Further Education and Training College Managers who had been selected to further their studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal during 2008-2010. It attempts to present a participant observer perspective on a two year journey in the form of co-ordinating and being involved with teaching a post-graduate programme for FET College managers located at various campuses in KwaZulu-Natal. This perspective was directed at developing an appreciation of institutional identity and management agency in relation to the development of social consciousness and partnership building. This required clarifying and directing the purposes and practices of the FET Colleges as a suite of organisations forming an integral dimension of the education reconstruction and transformation agenda in South Africa.

While at the outset I had hoped to find vigorous and vibrant partnerships flourishing between the FET Colleges and the industries and communities which surround them out of which I could begin to articulate and expand on thinking about new partnerships and their integrative capacity, I was soon brought to earth by being confronted with the realities the FET Managers shared with me. This indicated the level to which I had under-estimated the waves of change that they had been, and were still, experiencing and the time-span for new institutional identities to form and move towards optimal functionality. Thus, this study needs to be seen as carrying the warning of "proceeding with caution" and is presented as preliminary and tentative in a context which is best described as immature. It is in this situation where the FET Colleges were experiencing tensions between broad issues of institutional identity, re-culturing and staff turmoil that I was attempting to initiate a more

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[4] During 2011 the Department of Education was restructured resulting in a Ministry for Basic Education and another for Further and Higher Education.

appropriate strategy for organisational engagement. I became aware of the significant gap between the dictates of policy and the reality experienced by practitioners on the ground. This context, in my mind, does not negate the importance of new partnerships and connective leadership, but rather informs the urgency with which concerted effort is needed to enable transformation.

The study is limited to some FET institutions in a particular province, namely KZN, and further limited to a focus on the role that new partnerships can play in this construction. Thus, the primary intention of this research is to contribute to the exploration and articulation of this social role which is enacted through new partnerships and connective leadership. In this quest, my idea has always been that for an FET institution to be transformative and responsive, it has to do this through structuring itself in such a way that accommodates inter-relationships with other organisations where people are employed and with mechanisms designed for the advancement of economic development. Thus, a key perspective is of FET Colleges configured into systemic relationships with institutions where economic participation and growth are enhanced through their network, linkages and projects. This is, however, complicated by the economic and political environment in which their inter-relationships occur, namely high unemployment, labour volatility and poverty, and the residual aftermath of social histories in which the injustice of the apartheid era still endure. Further, the work of FET Colleges cannot be separated from an association with business growth and retention within a globalised liberal economic policy framework, namely the world of multi-national corporations and the wide variety of supply chains, as well as Local Economic Development, which is moving towards a more territorial approach in recognition of the invasive nature of international globalisation and the impact this has on local economies. Local economic potential cannot be realised without appropriate human development. The training regime in South Africa is designed to enable the disaggregation of work into competencies and skills, thus enabling new opportunities located in the local dialogue for economic development to be deconstructed and reconstructed into human capacity development.

### *A personal perspective*

It became clear to me, fairly early in the study, that looking for surfacing and exemplifying through emerging best, or at least good practice, was problematic. The reason I found was that the contemporary history of the institutions means that institutional identity is still in a formative and immature stage and that much of the energy of management staff is given to issues of institutional formation and stability, while lecturing staff are experiencing the repercussions of this change. Thus I felt the need to ensure that the research reflected the turbulent history of the sector, with the diversity of institutional cultures churning within the reconfiguring institutions. From a reflective practitioner perspective I was sensitised to this through my own experience within the Higher Education sector. I have been located within a University which has gone through a recent merger process and is seeking reconstruction through transformation. While I have not personally written about this experience in an academic form, I have been a participant observer of the difficulties associated with different institutional cultures and the on-going struggle for a post-apartheid African transformative identity. I have supervised students who have engaged with transformation in a number of contexts, including UKZN itself. I have seen the potential for both change and transformation, which some embrace, while others are more hesitant and cautious, unwilling to lose that which they regard as valuable from the past and unwilling to embrace an uncertain future.

Thus, while maintaining a strong action research dimension of working with the participants, the research also contains very significant dimensions of grounded theoretical development in relation to responsivity through new partnerships and connective leadership, very much in line with the espoused research theoretical approach presented in my proposal – namely a creative response, as suggested by Jackson in Creative Holism. By this I mean that I did not go into this research with a very specific hypothesis and an extensive designed questionnaire with a very precise sample in mind. Rather, I approached the research as a Critical Systems Researcher using Creative Holism with its innate bent towards action research and ensured that I located this appropriately within the methodological options available in Creative Holism. This is entirely consistent with the critical systems research trajectory which I explore more fully in chapter 4.

**Relationship with the participants**

The Leadership Centre was approached to develop a programme at Post-graduate level to provide training for second tier managers in the FET Colleges in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. This request originally emanated from a partnership programme funded by Daneda[5]. In the course of the rollout, this funding ended and the individual colleges took responsibility for funding their participants.

The profile of the participants is provided in Chapter 5. I have deliberately, for the sake of respecting confidentiality, referred to the participating FET Colleges by capital letter, the different campuses by small letters, and the participants by number.

Right from the beginning, I discussed the possibility of linking my research agenda with their academic programme. The project had the blessing of the committee of College rectors, who indicated an interest in participation on the understanding that this commitment was provisional on their on-going reflection. The agreement reached was that I would have access to all their written work, that, as course coordinator, I would hold regular discussions with them, and that I would verify anything I wrote through sharing it with them and getting their critical comment before making it public. This referred particularly to the chapters which reflect on practice rather than theory. Thus, a process of triangulation was inculcated into the culture of this research project.

I need to indicate my awareness, upfront, of the potential pitfall of working with students and the embedded power relationship. However, the very nature of my position as expressed in my living theory is to engage recursively with living theory – theirs and mine. I therefore, cannot but engage in this sensitive space and explore it as a collaborator alongside them. Gaining access to their writing was an issue of vital importance as I was particularly interested to see their articulation of their lived reality and the emergence of a critical capacity to analyse their problems through systemic diagrams and language. This I saw as essential in their quest towards an appreciation of the emergence of a greater capacity to reframe boundaries around the issues confronting the FET Colleges so that they could move beyond internal boundaries, that is boundaries which included only immediate stakeholders, namely staff, management, council and students, to more inclusive

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[5] The Danish aid agency.

boundaries which included the broader society into which the FET colleges need to integrate.

Of significance is the issue that just as I reserve the right to develop and share my living theory, so to, do the student participants. But theirs will be different to mine and while the notion of responsivity for me focuses on partnership building, theirs will have a focus defined by their particular interest. Our understandings of responsivity will in all likelihood differ. For me, I am looking at it rather broadly as an approach to increasing productivity and inclusion. For them, it could well refer to survival in a complex organisational environment.

**The FET College work**

The role of the FET Colleges and their intended capability are clear and articulated in the policy frameworks and practice at the various Colleges, as reflected in their marketing literature and their operational programmes. The FET Colleges teach intermediate skills within a competency based theory of education. This is done through a variety of programme formats, which differ in their qualification type, level and duration. Intermediate skills refer to the level of skilled technicians and craftspeople.

Qualification type refers to both Department of Labour (DoL) qualifications and Department of Education (DoE) qualifications. Department of Labour based qualifications require a particular frame of accreditation and assessment. Learnerships and short skills based learning programmes are the main offerings. National Technical Education Qualifications (NATED) framed programmes are also in this category. These are programmes from the previous regime and are integral to the apprenticeship models. DoE based qualifications, however, follow the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and are embedded in the National Curriculum Vocational. The emphasis here is on complete programmes which are FET Campus based with practical work usually incorporated into the campus facilities. The level refers to the NQF level at which a qualification is offered and duration refers to the length of time taken to complete a qualification.

The balancing of these various programme offerings adds a level of complication to the work of FET Management. However, it becomes even more complex when one locates the College within its broader framework, which is to facilitate the appropriate intake,

throughput and output, taking into account the necessity of aligning the throughput of the College with the requirements of the labour market. The labour market is subject to the vagaries of the economy with its classic modalities of shrinkage, expansion and change. The implications include:

- The necessity of accurate data flows from employers concerning their employment requirements as embedded in their workplace skills plans
- The high level of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, which is to a large extent an unknown factor and wildcard in employment patterns. Many youth have become disaffected, have fallen out of the job seeker category, and are surviving within structured unemployment.
- The careful interpretation and analysis of this data within the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA). This is intended to provide factual information for use in planning.
- The perceived rigor of the labour law making companies wary of over commitments to permanent labour, exacerbated by the practices of labour brokering.

The implications of the above are that the individual colleges experience market volatility and are best served by a responsive approach to strategy. This responsive approach is intended to favour the strategic building of alliances (partnerships) and become entrepreneurial or enterprising in their approach, both of which require the internalisation of a strategy around which to align staff endeavours. However, one has to remember that the dynamics of human agency are such that each individual is working from their own cognitive understandings with their embedded assumptions.

The government initiatives Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiatives for South Africa (AsgiSA) and Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) focussed attention on what are considered to be likely skills requirements for infrastructure development projects undertaken by government. This led to the process of re-curriculating and re-structuring the FET Colleges to have the running of National Curriculum Vocational (NCV) programmes as their predominant business, which was financially regulated through bursaries to individual students and subsidies to institutions.

The participants in this research were managers drawn from some of the nine public FET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. These are public funded colleges, one of the four sectors of FET provision, the others being secondary schools, private off-the-job providers and work-based education and training. These nine institutions are intended to provide a comprehensive infrastructure which provides for a variety of training facilities, staff and programmes aligned to the labour market. They have a responsibility to three major client groups, namely the pre-employed, employed and unemployed. The cycle is one of work opportunity, work training, work placement and work progression.

The management of the various institutions is expected to take optimal advantage of the opportunities of market aligned teaching programmes in order to ensure that graduates of programmes have a high likelihood of going straight from training into paid employment. However, in order to achieve their organisational goals, staff members have to first confront the reality that their own knowledge base needs to be aligned to that of their workplace and the learning processes within it. This key component of their professional work implies a phase of learning about identity and institutional culture, and an understanding of the functionality of the organisation, while at the same time providing teaching for the workplace.

Having visited many of the Colleges and experiencing their business and extent, as well as reading of the situations faced by the participants on the programme and discussing the issues facing them, the following information is presented.

Each of the nine FET institutions has a central administrative campus as well as a range of teaching campuses. Each institution is overseen and administered by means of a college council. All the Colleges are structured to accommodate human resources, finances, student support and curriculum as central office functions. Furthermore, they are all structured as a central office and a number of operational campuses managed by a campus manager.

The central administrative campus houses the Rector and deputy directors for each of the corporate, academic and finance functions. The Deputy Director (DD) Corporate oversees marketing, human resources and general administration, the DD Academic oversees campus management, research, student support services, quality management and the Further

Education and Training Management Information System (FETMIS) while the DD Finance oversees the financial affairs of the institution.

The management of the various institutions is expected to take optimal advantage of the opportunities of market aligned teaching programmes in order to ensure that graduates of programmes have a high likelihood of going straight from training into paid employment.

The programme portfolio offered at the Thekwini College, by way of example of the Colleges, includes National Curriculum Vocational (NCV) programmes in Information Technology, Automotive Repair and Maintenance, Fitting, Fabrication, Refrigeration, Electrical Infrastructure Construction, Office Administration, Finance, Economics and Accounting, Management, Safety in Society, Food and Hospitality, and Tourism. In relation to National Technical Qualifications (NATED), they offer Engineering Studies, Electrical Engineering (Heavy Current), Electrical Engineering (Light Current), Motor Mechanics, Fitting and Machining, Instrumentation, Mechanical Engineering), Business Studies (Marketing Management, Financial Management) Human Resource Management, Public Relations, Public Management and, under General Studies, Art and Design, Food and Hospitality, Hairdressing Skills, International Hair Care, Hair Care and Cosmetology, Hair Care and Beauty, Beauty Technology, Travel and Tourism and Computer Studies. Special Needs Programmes include Motor Skills, Welding, Fitting and Turning, Electrical, Woodwork, Hospitality, Hair-care and Beauty. Programmes are also offered in Marine Studies, which is an International Trade Skills Programme.

These programmes are spread over seven campuses with the different campuses taking on different specialisms.

The basic understanding of the Colleges, as represented above, needs to be nuanced in the following ways:

- The institutions have particular infrastructures and staff establishments which restrict their ability to be responsive. With change and development being a particularly cumbersome process, they can only offer what they are capacitated to offer.

- The social perceptions of FET Colleges are unfortunately tainted with perceptions of technical education being of lower status than academic education. Thus the colleges are seen as institutions of last resort rather than as realisable gateways into diverse career options.

- Labour market projections are difficult to make given the nature of the market itself. It is subject to the dynamics of private sector opportunism and economic viability, including upturns and downturns in the global and local economies.

- In providing their services, FET institutions have to manage their institutions as businesses. This means that the resources to run programmes have to be considered in the decision making of which programmes to offer. The programme offerings are currently dominated by the National Curriculum Vocational (NCV), for which programme funding is provided by the Department of Education. Funds are subject to allocations through the province, a process which can at times be erratic. These are large programmes and tend to dwarf the more entrepreneurial and nuanced programmes required by the local economy and for which funding is not as institutionally forthcoming.

- The public FET institutions are in competition with private providers of FET programmes. Furthermore, different colleges have different levels of sophistication in what they can offer, including access issues (rural and urban) and the quality of accommodation they are able to offer to students.

- The above issues can be further analysed from a systemic perspective by reference to those dimensions which are internal to the system, i.e. can be planned for and adapted, and those which can be considered as environmental as they fall outside of the direct control of the FET College itself.

## The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is straightforward. First, it is a reconstructive reflection on my role as a reflective practitioner/academic, incorporating a role as "virtual consultant" to the participating colleges, attempting to develop an awareness of new partnerships and connective leadership. My assumed mandate as a "virtual consultant" is in informing thinking about partnerships as a form of constructed responsivity to improve the contribution the FET Colleges can make to society in going about their work more efficiently

and effectively. I want to inform this knowledge through my own living theory about partnerships which is berthed in critical systems thinking and practice with the intention of improving my practice as a university teacher. My purpose in engaging with the concept of "virtual consultant" is one that has evolved in my practice within the Leadership Centre. My virtual consultancy is intended to introduce participants to a framework of thinking of themselves as agents of internal change.

The challenge presented in the "consultancy" is the challenge to be responsive and my engagement with the practitioner managers in developing an appreciation of responsivity with new partnerships competency development as the vehicle for responsiveness. However, I am framing this not as an objective outsider, but through a situated application of my own practice. This means that as a university teacher and researcher, I have positioned myself and articulated my identity as being a reflective practitioner developing a living theory for self-understanding of my purpose and practice. Thus, I use my practitioner research action to inform my curriculum development as an emergent social practice (Rowlands, 2005). I also need to indicate that, ideally, I would like my students, in this case the FET managers, to consider their own theory of responsivity, especially through partnerships. However, although for me, living theory reflexivity is something I deem valuable, and therefore promote, the process by implication is an intensely personal one akin to the "metanoia" that Senge (1990) writes about to explain the shift of mind he experienced in institutional learning. A living theory would be a contradiction if it were imposed and that is not my intention. Rather, by making evident my own experience of my own learning in the exposure of other reflective practitioners (Whitehead, 2008); I can at best spark the idea to those I teach.

Thus, I view a leadership development curriculum as not merely delineating an area of knowledge for onward transmission, but as a crafted intervention based on an appreciation of knowledge as a social construction, to influence the professional identity construct and competency base of my students. I tend to share the view expressed by Gough (2011 p 1) namely; *"Reconceiving curriculum, teaching and learning in terms of emergence foregrounds the non-linear, unpredictable and generative qualities of educational processes, and encourages us to value that which is unexpected and/or beyond our control."*

This emphasises that I am fully aware that we have to beware assuming predictability and linearity in our thinking and the expectations we have of particular outcomes. Rather we must be prepared to be surprised and work with emergence.

In order to assist the reader I suggest the following diagram which indicates two fundamental approaches to leadership which are well presented in the leadership literature, namely transactional and transformational, and two positions in relation to position, namely those internal to the organization and those external to it. It is intended to juxtaposition my role with the practitioner managers.

| | | Orientation towards FET College leadership | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | **Transactional leadership** (agent of compliance) | **Transformative leadership** (agent of change for improvement) |
| **Location in relation to the organisation** | **Internal** (within the organization) i.e. inside the FET Colleges | A situation where people feel powerless in the process of constructing the identity of the organization and see their role as passive implementers. **(Thus the option of the choice to simply do the qualification without the intention to apply change.)** | The **assumed** identity construct that I tend to impose in my work as a professional educator of the FET leadership cadre. I assume their readiness to engage in contextual progressive meaning-making through the situated and creative implementation of policy. (Thus the option of the choice of the participants to be internal change agents) |
| | **External** (outside of the organization) i.e. in the university | The traditional university approach to learning. The process of the contextualization of knowledge is externalized and is the student's responsibility. **(The role I would take as an objective, disengaged lecturer)** | The **perception** I have of myself in relation to the FET cadre thus assuming a teaching approach of learning for institutional transformation by means of agency transfer through the cadre. **(Thus my role as virtual consultant)** |

**Table 1 : Situational positions**

## Research style

By now it must be clear to you, the reader, that my style is that of a professional narrative which is designed to emphasise the fundamental importance of professional interpretation

with justification and subject to appropriate validation and collegial critique. Moreover, a deliberate attempt has been made to avoid a style that is too dense and cumbersome. I want it to be accessible to the practitioners with whom I have worked for their on-going critique and to encourage them to continue the community of practice we have fostered. My style, and indeed methodology, is significantly influenced by narrative researchers with whom I have engaged, namely Hobden (1999), Samuel (2000) and Pithouse (2007), who all wrote about the critical conscious process of curriculum developing through thoughtful practice. Their methodology prioritizes the importance of critical reconstruction of personal learning and student experience for the purposes of curriculum improvement.

My reflective stance as a professional is that I must be responsive, I must be accountable, I must be balanced and I must be fully present.  This requires me to be a mindful and constant learner, "attuned" to the present (Dane, 2011; Pillay, 2011). This provides a values test for my practice. For me, the concept of mindfulness enriches my understanding of living theory. It is mindfulness which assists me to articulate my purpose as well as facilitating my sense of contradiction.

## Professional learners and learning

For me, in the above described context, the professional learning curriculum is an educative act, rather than a training one. I see training as a separate, but related act, where the emphasis is on developing a particular competency; for instance becoming competent in a particular software programme. Education is a process of identity formation, and professional education about the formation of competent professional identity. Therefore, the conceptual separation of learning and teaching is representative of the split discourse of teacher centred or learner centred curriculum (Biggs, 2003; Walsh, 2007). In my opinion curriculum is not founded in this "either or" debate; it very clearly incorporates content, teaching and learning. Reflective practice includes engaging in conversation with other practitioners through the co-constructed meanings that emerge from the learning encounter. This is a challenging encounter because it informs mindful knowledge use. It is a shared professional space where participants learn from each other, thus bringing the notion of a community of practice into play (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

## Conclusion

In the chapters which follow, the project described above is going to be developed through a concentration on the social history and political context in which the FET Colleges are currently situated (Chapter 2); exploring the literature on the emerging field of new partnerships to build awareness of their complexity and inform the need for connective leadership (Chapter 3); explaining my use of Creative Holism as a form of critical systems research (Chapter 4); providing contextual insight into the current FET realities (Chapter 5); developing propositions through Soft Systems Methodology (Chapter 6); proposing a viable framework out of which responsive partnerships can be managed (Chapter 7), and finally sharing my learning from the thesis (Chapter 8)

# Chapter 2

# Transformation and the FET Colleges

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an understanding of the research question and indicated the manner in which I intend to go about addressing it. I made mention of the recent history of the sector and its complex trajectory. In this chapter, by providing a deeper and more nuanced historic context, I provide a sitz-im-leben[6] for the particular questions I have posed. I make the assumption that due to the unfolding of history in South Africa, the current situation of institutions in this country is the consequence of a merger process between the pre-apartheid system and the new democratic regime and that these institutions are manned by staff members from various backgrounds who have very different institutional memories, which influences the difficulties associated with their identities being transformed towards the expectations of policy. This chapter draws predominantly from the literature of the FET sector and the structural issues in which it is embedded. A later chapter will provide insight into the perceptions of the participants at the time the research was conducted. This chapter, therefore, provides a context for understanding the contemporary situation in the FET Colleges and the social history leading to the current situation. It explores the current situation in some depth, the material for which has been provided through my engagement with the students on the Post-Graduate Diploma and my consequent immersion in the FET sector.

The chapter reflects the position that living theory has to be grounded in an appreciation of the context in which people practice their professions. The way people interpret events and respond to change has been influenced through the experiences of their own lives. Each one of the participant managers, in their own way, and along their own path, was influenced by the social injustices embedded in the unfolding FET experience.

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[6] A German phrase roughly meaning "situation in life" often used in Biblical criticism and which I have found useful from my days of studying Biblical Studies and Theology

## Transformation in the FET Sector

As part of the on-going transformation process taking place in South Africa, substantial changes have been made in the Further Education and Training Sector with the intention that this sector will add value to society through enhancing employment and employability through developing greater flexibility and responsivity in its provision of appropriate and sufficient high quality training. This is not a unique phenomenon, however, as many countries in the world are looking to education reforms at the 'school to work', 'school in work' and 'school for work' interfaces. Much of this has to do with a new emphasis on learning with knowledge creation a primary form of capital in newer forms of business. (Lewis, 2005 p 442) asks, *"Just what constitutes knowledge when it is constructed in workplaces?"* He sees this as a convergence of discourses about learning and draws attention to the distinction between proposition based and process based learning, a distinction also made by McNiff (2000). This is a pertinent question in South Africa as we seek to build our base in the knowledge economy. However, there are other ways, such as apprenticeship, where knowledge transfer in relation to skills can have an important place in our current phase of development. Apprenticeships, however, are considered to be more aligned to a mechanistic rather than an academic transfer of management knowledge.

The FET sector is associated with intermediate skills and is not considered as a form of higher education. It is also the sector with the potential to direct many young South Africans into employment. I have been informed by the FET managers participating in this research that studies have been undertaken by South African delegations to explore different systems in different parts of the world, particularly Australia and the United Kingdom, in order to inform our own policy development and provide examples of practice in those who have chosen the path of FET reform before us. Thus, contemporary policy documents indicate that a key role expected of the Colleges in this sector is to influence systemic change in the workforce, mainly through a greater emphasis on knowledge transfer, as well as the up-skilling of the work-force and bringing new employees into it to extend it. In order to do this, the sector is expected to develop and exhibit responsive behaviour, which includes developing strong interrelationships with broader society, in particular with various state departments and the business sector, to facilitate leveraged systemic change, mainly

through innovative curriculum design and programme delivery, and the building of linkages and enhancing of value chains. In particular, the public Further Education and Training Colleges are meant to be at the core of the transformation process through constructing appropriate social partnerships. However, in reality, under the unique circumstances experienced by FET Colleges in South Africa, it is unlikely that one will find deeply embedded views of knowledge and knowledge transfer for the emerging economy. This takes time and learning.

According to the Green Paper (DoE., 1998), the FET sector is seen to be situated at the intersection of a number of policy initiatives, namely macro-economic, industrial, labour market and human resource development, with particular relevance to the knowledge based economy, and thus requires collective effort for lifelong learning, employability and increased productivity. The Green Paper also acknowledges that FET is recognised internationally, when viewed broadly, as contributing to social cohesion and the economy, and in our case, social and cultural diversity. Moreover, as the Green Paper on FET asserts, globalisation requires responsiveness in terms of trade, technology, knowledge and skills in a rapidly changing world economy. The new production paradigm requires flexible specialisation and high quality products and services for niche markets. This requires an ability to adapt to unpredictable and volatile conditions, markets and technologies. It therefore becomes essential that the emerging workforce become equipped with broad problem solving skills, the capability of applying new technologies, an understanding of how production processes unfold and the ability to respond to unexpected factors. Thus it is important to note that I have no naive view that the FET sector creates jobs. Rather, it has to be seen as complementary to a growing economy and other government initiatives within the developmental state – the terminology used by the South African government to indicate a particular form of government intervention.

It must be noted at this juncture that partnerships are also advocated as a strategy in Higher Education (Barnes & Phillips, 2000), and that the FET sector has to forge articulation links with Higher Education as part of the seamless accreditation strategy envisaged for the country.

Although the FET policy direction is not unique to South Africa, it must be remembered that South Africa is taking a particular trajectory of rapid change and transformation as a consequence of the fragmented and racially segmented base of pre 1994.

> *"A new landscape for FET Colleges represents a significant and decisive break from the old apartheid system of technical/vocational education and training in South Africa" (DoE, 2001).*

While the reading of policy provides one with an understanding of the vision and mission statements, the goals, objectives and the purpose of the designed change and the implementation of policy is another matter. Policy provides guidelines and frameworks rather than specific actions and, in reality, a process of transformation requires profound change in the minds of people, as well as the development of new competencies and the establishment of new institutional strategies, arrangements and structures.

The contemporary period in FET history reveals profound merger initiatives, re-curriculating and new governance mandates designed for the FET Colleges to play a transformative role in social transformation. The process of implementation, moreover, is fraught with the interplay of desired and undesired emergent properties and the processes of organisational human interactions. The Green Paper makes reference to a developmental approach, which makes demands on leadership. This is also acknowledged by the Department of Education (DoE 2001), who indicates that strong visionary leadership as well as trained and effective staff members will be required to lead, manage and sustain these colleges. The Green Paper acknowledges the restraints on the sector, including the social inequalities generated during the apartheid era, the broader problem of systems failure throughout the schooling system, which has had an influence on the low morale, different levels of quality in various institutions and the poor articulation between training and work opportunities. It also highlights the changing social demands in post-apartheid South Africa, notably redress, rural development, life-long learning and the expansion of FET requiring open rather than closed systems, nation building, a new relationship between the state, civil society and the individual. The increased institutional authority vested in the governance structures will therefore, require better qualified, sophisticated and capable leaders and managers.

The FET sector has a broad potential client base attracting students for specific programmes in response to identified needs in the private sector, the public sector and civil society.

## FET Colleges and the Private Sector

From the private sector, work opportunities can be segmented into programmes that can be planned for, for example, Labour Market analysis and Scarce Skills (Badroodien, 2003; DoL., 2007; *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*, 2008) and the Workplace Skills Plans, generated in compliance to labour law, as well as predictions of the human resource requirements of new developments, in particular geographic localities (housing developments, retail malls, office blocks, industrial developments). All of the above carry the risk that their accuracy is conditional on economic cycles which significantly influence economic growth and the impact this has on labour volatility. Thus, the premise with which the FET College has to work is one of possibilities and probabilities and not certainties. The most certain modality, however, is that of learnerships because the learner becomes formally linked to an employer at the inception of the training programme.

I would suggest that the FET Colleges need to take the lead in identifying potential opportunities in the workplace. These opportunities need to be framed as training based transactions for their viability to be ascertained. This means that the marketing of the options needs to take cognizance of the potential numbers of people envisaged; the particular programmes required, taking into account input and output competency levels; the length of programmes; the scheduling of learning to take into account theory and practice; the resources required in relation to teaching facilities; materials; and teaching competencies.

## FET Colleges and the Public Sector

In considering the growth in job opportunities provided by both the public and private sectors, macro and local economic development initiatives have to be taken into account with regard to skills requirements. The planned infrastructure development for the Metro or District and its municipalities is set out in the particular Integrated Development Plan (IDP). This plan is intended, under the framework of both (i) cooperative government and (ii) developmental government, to integrate policy frameworks that impact at national,

provincial and district level (cooperative) and which promote the development of those disadvantaged as a consequence of their locality by increasing their access to a broad raft of services (developmental).

The IDP thus plans for infrastructure development which includes the accurate surveying of territory, the planning of roadways, railways, waterways and airways and the designing of special configurations to meet the envisaged needs of land usage requirements including towns, stations, airports, housing, commercial, industrial, services (electricity, water, drainage, sewage) and facilities (schools, hospitals, sports etc.). Competencies are required at all phases in this development, its infrastructure building phase, its uptake phase, its servicing phase and its maintenance phase. The greater the development and extension of areas where development is occurring, the higher the need for people equipped with professional, engineering, technical, artisan, craft, managerial and service skills.

## The FET Sector and Civil Society

At the civil society level, there is a growing awareness of the social dynamics that are unique to South African and the consequence these have for training. Examples include community policing and particular aspects of social welfare (child headed households, care of the aged, poverty alleviation etc.).  It is in relation to civil society that the impact of unemployment affects livelihoods and social conditions. My argument is that a viable FET Sector in South Africa would increase opportunities for participation in the economy, reduce the need for grants and allow people the choices that come with discretionary income. Thus, quality training has a knock-on effect. Competencies relevant to the job market, be it local or regional, increase opportunities, decent work leads to decent wages, which in turn lead to an enhanced quality of life.

## Public vs. private FET provision

Reference has been made that FET programmes are designed to cater for both the public and private sectors. It is understood, however, that programmes that have been defined with the public sector in mind are a responsibility of government. While funding streams are made available for providing students with bursaries, these, however, are applied as a mechanism to point learners in the direction of government identified priorities. As far as

the private sector is concerned, they are obligated to have organisational Skills Development plans which will make reference to the opportunities that are opening up through staff turn-over and expansion. The policy intention is for this to be an area of activity populated by viable learnerships.

## The New Partnership Theory

The process of co-operative education has a long history in the FET sector. This approach is the basis of the apprenticeship system in the trades and is designed specifically for education when practice and practical skills are seen as being equal to, if not more important than, theoretical education. Many professions have also used manifestations of co-operative education through various formulations of work and education or training, either with the practical component embedded in the theoretical aspect or following after it.

In South Africa, in the reconceptualization of the education system the concept of learnerships was introduced as a sophistication of the apprenticeship system and was considered to be one of the cornerstones of the educational reconfiguration project. However, learnerships speak to a curriculum type configuration which emphasises the need for more theory and better managed practice and assessment. Learnerships are supported and promoted by the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which are a component of South Africa's raft of new labour policies. The SETAs have come about through the amalgamation of the various training bodies that existed within the apprenticeship system during the apartheid era. However, the approach I am advocating goes beyond learnerships and is founded in a political theory that works on the assumption that the emerging concept of new partnerships, which will be described in more detail in Chapter 3, seeks a broad range of collaborative rather than adversarial relationships. In particular, this theory accepts that it is useful to think of society as being comprised of the three sectors, public, private and civil, and proposes that we must actively seek to build healthy relationships between them. Thus, new partnerships are a manifestation of the application of this new political thinking into the social realm. The rationale for the FET sector to be embedded in partnerships is that it would be in the best interests of all for South Africa to develop its skills base and build an inclusive economy, thus bringing about a

rapid decrease in unemployment. The social benefit would be that, by becoming more skilled, people would be more enterprising and take more responsibility for their own lives. This would lower the welfare load on government and ameliorate the social degradation that occurs alongside endemic poverty and unemployment. At a conceptual level, value is added through developing the base of skills that enhance work opportunities, working on the assumption that work with dignity provides a crucial social overlay to families and communities in order to promote productive self- worth within a market economy.

## Responsiveness as a key focus

This research explores the development of the FET Colleges preparedness and ability to be responsive and is informed by my view of Societal Value Creation (SVC) within the FET sector, especially as it pertains to some FET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal and in particular to partnerships as a key strategic imperative of these institutions. The research challenges a naive assumption that developmental capacity can be created by means of a technical implementation process, and that this will result in responsive capability. Authentic responsiveness is a deeply complex process. At a simple level, it can be viewed as an outcome of various systemic processes, including the strategic thinking of those leading the institutions, particularly as they interpret policy, build their organisations and engage with their communities. It has to encompass the practices of those at the front end of these institutions' engagement with the world at all levels. The literature on strategy, however, indicates that change of this nature is not unproblematic and is the subject of on-going conceptualisation and contemporary research (Bodhanya, 2009). Thus, it is anticipated that in developing an understanding of strategic thinking within the contemporary FET sector, our learning about leadership strategy within complex adaptive systems will be enhanced.

Of particular importance is whether the inefficiencies associated with the sector are being addressed. This includes the weak linkages with industry, the collapsed youth labour market and the poor culture of learning. Moreover, are the opportunities provided by globalisation being accommodated and how is the sector contributing to the innovation challenges of the South African economy? The reversal of these negative trends would be a positive trend in building South African society.

## Background to the FET sector

In order to understand the recent changes in the FET sector, one needs to appreciate that this sector was made up of a variety of institutions with very distinctive organisational identities forged in apartheid policy and practice. These institutions, from their very different moulds or pathways, have been re-cast into new institutions and redirected in their pursuits, and, at the same time, been presented with powerful new agendas through policy initiatives. The dynamics created by these various trajectories are reflected throughout this dissertation.

## The pre 1994 situation

The pre-1994 situation was one of separation by race and informed by ideological constraints. Technical colleges were provided exclusively for white South Africans until the 1970s saw an economic need to change this. Vocational education was seen as the preserve of organisations of a more missionary nature. Industrial education was differentiated to ensure that only low skill jobs were available for disenfranchised (black) South Africans.

### *Technical education*

Gamble (2003) provides insight into the historical factors which have shaped the theory/practice divide. With technical colleges drawing heavily on the English tradition, these colleges were aimed at industry and were more practical in nature. This distinction was justified to protect the industries in that their trade secrets would be kept out of the open domain of public education. Furthermore, if government funded colleges provided direct training for private sector companies, this could be construed as a government subsidy.

The relationship between scientific knowledge and craft based knowledge meant that the technical colleges drew on the academic tradition of scientific knowledge and thus focused on concept formation, whereas the workplace rather valued craft based knowledge and put the emphasis on practice. Thus, the notion of apprenticeship was one which clearly separated and scheduled conceptual learning and work based application. Apprentices were considered as employees (Gamble, 2003) and their studies were sponsored by the workplace.

In South Africa, up until the growth phase associated with the late sixties and early seventies, black South Africans were virtually disallowed from participation in technical education, due to the high education input demands not afforded them by Bantu education. In spite of this, however, the skills shortage of this time resulted in a deliberate policy to build separate technical colleges to prepare prospective black workers for some levels in the workforce (The Manpower Act of 1981).

The de-racialisation of apprenticeships in South Africa coincided with a change in thinking about apprenticeships. The move was to study first (for longer) and then find employment later. This was the situation inherited by the new government of 1994 whereby many young black people had access to state subsidised theoretical technical training which were not directly linked to job opportunities.

## *Vocational education*

Gamble (2003) explains the different social histories of technical and vocational education. According to this author, vocational education has its links back into providing training to the indigent, poor and "less able" to make them more self-sufficient. This has links to programmes associated with religious organisations.

However, in more recent times, this form of education has been used as a political device. According to Sultana (1997), referenced by Gamble,

> *"The creation of separate education spaces is often appropriated by mainstream teachers, who use them as convenient 'dumping' sites for students who they find difficult to control. Thus, while the official discourse around vocational schools highlights their utility to the economy, their real value to the education system is their function as holding pens for the unmotivated and resistant students"(Gamble p334)*

## *Industrial Education*

Hartshorne (1987), as referenced by Gamble (2003), points out that in the late sixties, rather than speak of technical education, black education spoke of vocational or industrial education. This implied that the difference in standard and content was significant.

Thus, Chisholm (1992), also quoted by Gamble, cites the following difference between white and black technical colleges.

> *"In the historically white college, technical education encompassed both theoretical and practical training in workshops and on-job. In the historically black college, the focus was on the acquisition of practical manual skill, which was aimed at the unskilled and semi-skilled end of the informal market" (Gamble, 2003:10).*

Thus, the ensuing situation is well summarised by McGrath and Akoojee (2007);

> *"The evolution of attitudes towards skill of labour market structures and of the economy in just over a century of South African industrialisation by 1994 resulted in a seriously dysfunctional skills development system" (p 424).*

The above authors claim that not only were skills racialised and gendered, but institutions were dysfunctional and fragmented, with both government and business distant. With skills focussing on the polar ends, there was little emphasis on intermediate skills.

## The post-1994 situation

The post-1994 situation is one in which South Africa has attempted to redefine policy and practice, initially to remove all vestiges of apartheid policy and increasingly to align and locate South African competitiveness internationally. The Further Education and Training Sector has been an important part of this process, receiving specific attention as the main player in providing intermediate skills. It has been redefined through policy and resourced to play an important role in human resource and skills development provision. At the same time, and aligned to this, has been the reformation of training bodies in all sectors of employment into Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA), funded through a work based pay-roll related subsidy.

A national qualifications redefinition and integration process was initiated in 1995, which still continues. The South African Qualifications Act (Act 58 of 1995) uses an outcomes based approach within a tiered system of education levels intended to align the standards of all institutions.

The FET landscape has been fundamentally redrawn with a "boundary to boundary" redefinition of FET institutions with the intention of ensuring a broad based coverage of aligned programmes defined into the sector. At the present time, these FET institutions are going through radical curriculum reform and recapitalisation projects. The early years of this transition have been recorded by various authors (Kraak & Hall, 1999; Powell & Hall, 2000).

Also of interest to this study is the promulgation and application of learnerships as a new form of apprenticeship, which has many similarities with the new apprenticeship model in the UK. While this process is in its infancy,

> *"Nevertheless, in the provision of these learnerships, education and labour sectors have come together in a form of further education that has been targeted to develop workplace competencies and promote entrepreneurship. This phase has been earmarked as foundational for human resource development and job creation. As a consequence, and in line with major international economies, the further education sector has been targeted extensively for partnership development at various levels. At the macro level, this has involved the national Department of Education and the Business Trust, and at the meso level Colleges have been reshaped within the provincial context, in order to ensure an understanding, national in scope, of the facilities available and their location. This restructuring has led to the redefinition of boundaries: these have incorporated existing infrastructures into groupings that are now aligned to the new provincial boundaries of the country. This merging process has involved the identification of 'head offices' for each restructured college; the appointment of governing councils and management staff and their training; and, the realignment of curricula. This entire procedure was incorporated within an extensive framework of strategic planning, for which specific contexts and structures were envisaged, including partnerships.*
>
> *Each college has to establish and maintain strong partnerships and networks of key parties. Most important of these will be industries relevant to the college niche areas, the SETA's, the appropriate higher education institutions, local community structures, relevant government departments and sister institutions locally, in Africa and abroad"* (Asmal, 2003).

**The contemporary situation**

The contemporary situation has been influenced by the ongoing policy development of government. This includes the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 1995, and the appointment of the National Committee of Further Education (NCFE) in 1996. The report was published in 1997 as a Framework for the Transformation of FET in South Africa. This led to the publication of the Further Education and Training Act (Act No 98 of 1998), which guided and governed the FET sector from 1998 until 2006. This resulted in the Green Paper on Further Education and Training (1998) and the re-landscaping of the FET Colleges, including their reconfigurations (DoE 2001). The next act, the Further Education and Training Colleges Act 16 of 2006 provided for major change in terms of the powers of councils and the employment of staff, funding norms and the reconstruction of curricula. It was this policy framework in particular which was still influencing the FET Colleges at the time of this research. Further development has been the transfer of the FET Colleges from a provincial to a national competency.

Thus, the FET Colleges have been targeted for transformation as a cornerstone of the ANC led government's commitment to providing a comprehensive education and skills development landscape that does away with the fragmented and racially biased terrain they inherited. This has led to a whole new raft of policy and policy derivations. In relation to the FET sector, it has resulted in the consolidation of various institutions and amalgamated them into 50 territorial Colleges throughout South Africa. In the section which follows, insight will be provided into the extent and impact of this change.

The contemporary FET institutions are the product of the merging of various racially nuanced traditions within a sector which has historically been perceived to be of low status. From a policy perspective, these institutions have now been re-conceptualised and redefined in their status and importance and are expected to perform a significant role in Human Resource Development as a key component of the human resource strategy of South Africa. The extent to which this is happening is of significance to this thesis.

King, (2007) indicates that the history of non-cooperation of institutions involved in education, skills and employment is still a major issue internationally and is indeed a key factor in the South African situation. This extends to the area of a systemic appreciation of

the need for coherence in thinking and practice.  This author states that it took until 2007 for the FET institutions in South Africa to align their curricula with the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and, even so, the new curricula are not yet aligned with the Sector Education and Training Authorities. The roots of these difficulties are seen to be deep *"inter-institutional cultures and rivalries"* and cannot be easily overturned *"even when high-level political champions are in place"* (King, 2007), p 255). It is these institutional alignments and mechanisms which are essential for partnerships to emerge.

A further factor is that the policy based expectations imply a good working relationship between the public and private sectors which should be realised in partnering initiatives within the FET Colleges. This is a naive expectation given the social histories of the sectors. Thus, the work of such institutions as the National Business Initiative (personal engagement) have located themselves in interventions to build social capital through business funding working in collaboration with government priorities.

This thesis argues that effective responsive mechanisms are the consequence of strategy, which emanates from an institution which understands its competency and capacity constraints, yet which is progressive in its desire to provide quality, focused FET. The awareness of these competency and capacity constraints is a consequence of healthy organisational self-understanding of its complex adaptive nature. The FET Colleges in South Africa have been mandated through policy to be responsive institutions in the provision of Further Education and Training. This implies that these institutions are to be at the forefront of preparing youth and adults for opportunities in the South African economy in a way that is fine tuned to training, which will lead to immediate absorption or progression.

The thinking behind the approach of the Department of Labour, as manifest in the Scarce Skills List, is important to consider. Manifestations prior to this document were the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) and the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), which followed on from the Growth, Empowerment and Redistribution (GEAR), all documents which reflect a concern for South Africa in the global economy.  It is in the light of these initiatives that fundamental exercises in merging, recapitalisation, re-curriculation and governance of the FET Colleges has taken place.

The post-apartheid political economy of South Africa has emerged as one cautiously accommodating of globalisation for the purposes of international competitiveness on the assumption that this will accelerate job growth and promote international investment. Carmody (2002) speaks of South Africa's experiences of globalisation as one which is internally generated. He contrasts this with other Southern African states where globalisation has been imposed by the World Bank and its affiliates. Thus GEAR, which informs FET policy, is considered as an orthodox approach to economic reform and ties in with government policy to pressure South African industry to become internationally competitive. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the South African FET sector has informed policy development through learning from those countries which are seen as being internationally competitive.  However, South Africa faces considerable challenges in this regard. According to Turok (2010 p 487),

> *"Only two-fifths of its working-age adults are in employment, compared with two-thirds in many other countries (OECD, 2008; International labour Organisation [ILO], 2009). Self-employment and the small and micro-enterprise sector also appear much smaller than in most developed countries (The Presidency, 2008b). Large income inequalities are worsened by distorted settlement patterns, which trap poor communities in peripheral urban townships and remote rural areas."*

These factors have to be taken into account when we consider that the core purpose and competency of FET Colleges should be learning for work, and learning in and through work. Not only should the colleges strive to make their institution the institution of choice for aspirant learners, but their extended societal role is to add value to society, thus making learners exiting the college better citizens and employees of choice. The key to achieve these objectives is in understanding the opportunities embedded in the environment.  The core competency of the workplace is the profitable employment of individuals which can be informed by broad and detailed competency profiles. In South Africa, this is partially captured through the comprehensive qualifications registration and articulation processes going right down to job specific unit standards. However, institutional dynamics, which facilitate workplace integration and motivation, play a key role in the integration of learning into performance.  This leads logically to the importance of strategy.

The policy embedded documents referred to above point the operations of the FET Colleges in a strategic direction. Strategy is a process which is institutionally located and is intended to address the relationship between the internal institutional capacity and the external world of opportunity in which it exists. Is strategy a learned competence? And if so, what will influence the development of this competence? It is contended and will be argued that strategy is an emergent property of complex adaptive systems. In this theory on complex adaptive systems, Stacey (2007) provides a language for insight into what organisations are and what is actually happening in them. It is not a matter of choice – institutions cannot desire to become complex adaptive – they are, and a consciousness of this reality provides them with the opportunity of experimenting with change within an established theoretical framework (Geyer & Rihani, 2010). This means that in order to understand what is happening within organisations, one has to develop insights into the organisational culture, the forms of control and communication within them, as well as the patterns of behaviour being exhibited.

One of the strategic issues that have to be considered is the institutional mechanisms that are developed to manage inter-institutional arrangements, particularly between the FET institution and the employment institutions into which graduates will move on completion of their studies. What facilitative mechanisms are required and on what assumptions are they based? For example, Marock and Gamble (2008), in their work in the National Business Initiative College Industry Partnership, identify two main approaches. The one is a relationship which is instrumental and specific to particular interventions – a service level agreement. The other is where the relationship is more inclusive and synergistic in relation to priorities – a social partnership relationship. This is also considered to be an approach which leads to more robust knowledge construction.

It is clear from the above discussion that FET Institutions have been through a regime shift in the natural world. It is claimed that *"although we understand regime shifts retrospectively, it is difficult to predict them in advance"* (Folke et al., 2002 p 438). While change can be rationalized and anticipated, the actual nature of the change is dynamic. Although certain acts can be mandated e.g. restructuring, governance mechanisms, curriculum, the consequences cannot be predicted. Speaking about health services in the UK, (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001) draw the distinction between competence and capability.

Competence refers to knowledge, skill and attitude, while capability refers to the ability for self-directed change and knowledge renewal in line with changing values and goals in changing contexts. I suggest that both competence and capability have to be built into the learning of the FET Colleges.

An assumption that change is linear and able to be directed can easily lead to surprise and confusion. When we impose regime change on an organization, the organization reacts and kicks back. In systems language, this is the key construct of feedback. This process is understood to be irreversible in complexity thinking.

In the FET sector, policy recognizes the importance of inter-relationships, yet this recognition does not lead to automatic inter-relational competency – this has to be learned. What stimulates and shapes this learning? Are barriers to learning a learning response?

McGrath and Akoojee (2007) make the argument that state intervention is complex within globalisation, and that education and training is one of the few areas for deliberate intervention as a tool for economic competitiveness and social inclusion.

In relation to development policy, South Africa, after reviewing the 1994-2004 period, moved more powerfully towards a policy of the developmental state within the broader parameters of competitive globalisation. This influenced the development of AsgiSA with its six themes, namely: (i) to use infrastructure development as a skeleton; (ii) Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE); (iii) skills and education; (iv) alignment of the first and second economy leading to the elimination of the second economy; (v) macro-economic alignment; and (vi) service delivery. This included a deliberate policy to upgrade public FET as part of a broad recognition of the chronic skills shortages. Thus AsgiSA and JIPSA need to be viewed as a reorientation of policy and resources given the reflexive processes of the state in its agenda of holistic transformation, and key to informing the work of the FET Colleges. JIPSA was intended to provide the alignment of AsgiSA with educational institutions and their social partners. This was also intended to incorporate the acceleration of educational transformation within a revitalised national skills development framework. Thus, the policy frameworks embedded in AsgiSA and JIPSA have played a distinctive role in the reshaping of the FET institutions. These policies have to be seen in the light of what

McGrath and Akoojee (2007) refer to as "the historical legacy" which, according to these authors, has;

> "...resulted in a range of structural problems and a poor performance on poverty, inequality and unemployment that belies the country's wealth and level of development" (p 422).

On the other hand, these policies need to be seen as what is called developmental government in South Africa or deliberative democracy in Ireland (Teague, 2006).

In reviewing progress to date at their time of writing, McGrath and Akoojee indicate that the FET sector still faces many challenges. They indicate that it is still "fragile" and untested in its relevance and quality (McGrath & Akoojee, 2007) They list curriculum diversification, staffing, education and labour departmental alignment and broad based transformation as issues (p 430). Kraak (2008) points out that although the economy had dramatically improved by 2006, there was still a dramatic disconnect and lack of alignment between education and the economy. He wrote;

> "South African society has shifted from an era characterised by economic stagnation in the 1990s to one in which the rate of economic growth is far outstripping the ability of supply side institutions to provide the necessary quality and quantity of skills" (2008 p 2).

It is in this institutional space that the FET managers with whom I worked are located. I approached my engagement with them with a desire to express a view that professional people need to be consciously, deliberately and consistently involved in their own professional development. In so doing, practitioners constantly need reminding of the five e's, namely efficacy, efficiency, effectiveness, ethicality and elegance. Efficacy refers to whether the solution works; efficiency to determining that the least possible resources are used without compromising quality; effectiveness to the sustainability of the solution; ethicality to the moral and spiritual values embedded in the solution; and elegance to the sophistication of their presentation. This framework, ("the five e's") is attributed to Churchman (Armson, 2011 p 255). The managers cannot be, and must reject being, considered as implementers, which assumes that the strategic thinking behind their

endeavours is separated from them. They are at the front-line of the institutions out of which they work and engage with their communities as professionals. By indicating that they work out of an institution, I am implying that they have internalized the values embedded in the institution and should be considered a living representation of the institution.

This expression of personal value and presence is advanced by participating in communities of practice where these ideals are articulated and exemplified. I work from the assumption that sense-making remains a crucial element of South Africa's on-going transformation, a process that the FET Colleges and the professionals serving in them are encouraged to promote. Sense-making requires developing strong networks of mutual interdependence and individual endeavour to both co-construct and be socially motivated to personally contribute optimally to the well-being of society.

The basic model on which this research is premised is one which considers processes of input, throughput and output in FET Colleges. It is a model that recognises the ideal of efficacy, efficiency, effectiveness ethicality and elegance and the realities associated with input, throughput and output, which cause dramatic oscillations in the pursuit of the ideal. Thus, it focuses on building and substantiating an approach to modelling partnerships and uses the notion of partnership building as a key strategic approach. However, the recognition of the social construction of knowledge and the need for the purposeful construction of living theory is seen as central. This model needs to be inspired by a belief that the system is contributing significantly to the fundamental transformation of South African society through skills development, which has a potential knock-on effect on the quality of life.

The table which follows indicates that the FET Colleges are complex organisations. They have to manage inputs from the environment concerning their location, institutional environment, skills requirements of potential clients, and the resources and facilities available to them; they have to engage with the externally imposed processes of new policy initiatives, models such as learnerships, and building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders; they have to be sensitive to the opportunities for their student outputs, both in the formal economy and those institutions designed for entrepreneurship development;

and they have to consider internal processes regarding the employment, orientation and mentoring of staff, the management of knowledge, skills and teaching and learning processes, student welfare, academic administration and strategic management for sustainable organisational growth and development.

| INPUTS | PROCESSES | OUTPUTS | FEEDBACK |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Students requiring training** | **The FET Processes** | **Graduating students** | |
| **Input factors: (1)**<br><br>• Existing skills base<br>• Funding<br>• Awareness of future needs by potential client organisations<br>• Urban/rural bias<br>• Accessibility<br>• Transport<br>• Accommodation<br>• Peace and security<br>• Equity and redress (gender, race disability)<br>• Attitudinal and reputational perspectives | **External processes (2)**<br>• Policy initiatives<br>• Financial incentives<br>• Learnership model<br>• Stakeholder relationships<br><br>**Internal processes(4)**<br><br>• Institutional processes<br>• Professional processes<br>• Student welfare<br>• Knowledge management<br>• Sustainable models | **Output factors (3)**<br><br>• Existing vacancy base<br>• Location of opportunities<br>• Access to business generation platforms | Messages coming back about value ascribed to outputs and outcomes |

**Table 2 : FET Model**

The model is intended to represent the systemic nature of the work of the FET Sector. It indicates a number of input factors that influence the number and variety of students who are accepted into the FET Colleges. These students are influenced by processes both internal and external to the FET College. The external processes relate to other stakeholder groups and institutions that have an important part to play, while the internal processes are predominantly about the governance and management of the FET Colleges. The outputs are graduating students and feedback refers to their assimilation and reputation. Feedback becomes an input factor and influences processes.

Essentially, a successful FET system would be one through which individually funded students with a positive attitude towards work and with self-understanding in relation to expectations and limitations, in sufficient numbers to ensure institutional viability, enter a college in which there is a culture of understanding, support and expertise, to maximise the students' experience in the pursuit of vocational competencies and attitude, both

theoretically and practically. On completion of the period of college-based learning interlaced with workplace experience and practice, the students would enter into the market in an enabling work position.

## Policy Mandates

Policy mandated change has as its core a political rationale, which, in South Africa, is about transformation and accommodation. It therefore has an imperative dynamic. However, experience teaches that policy seldom achieves its intended purposes, especially within the time-spans set. While from a policy perspective the logic of policy and even its moral purpose can be followed and the concepts understood, for those working in the institutions where policy is being mandated the actual process of change is experienced as disjointed, confusing and possibly even disempowering. Fullan (1999) writes in a way that captures this phenomenon from his extensive understanding of educational reform;

> *"...the new science of complexity essentially claims that the link between cause and effect is difficult to trace, that change (planned and otherwise) unfolds in non-linear ways, that paradoxes and contradictions abound and that creative solutions arise out of interaction under conditions of uncertainty, diversity and instability"*
> *(p. 4).*

This thesis is based on the logic that change within institutions should be accepted as being dynamic and turbulent. It works on the assumption that while we can mandate behaviour based on a belief system, what actually happens in organizations is a consequence of personal agency and organizational dynamics leading to the enterprising use of resources.

Policy mandated change has as its rationale the political argument that change can be pre-determined and implemented. Thus, policy informs a resource based view of strategy, which implies that if you plan something well enough and apply the necessary training and resources, your pre-determined plan can come to fruition. Staecy, (2007) points out the fallacy that;

> *"It is thought that an organisation system can be designed in deliberate, rational ways, largely by the most powerful members of that organization." (p 10)*

The general assumption, therefore, is that the leaders can shape an institution by determining the vision and mission of the institution. Stacy suggests that this view of strategy and organisational leadership is, however, far from the truth and that, in reality, many situations are fraught with uncertainty, which has a significant impact on leadership, thus requiring the leaders to be complex adaptive. The theory of complex adaptive systems (CAS) assists one in theorising about what is actually happening in the organisation. CAS works on the assumption that while we can mandate behaviour based on a belief system, what actually happens in organizations is a consequence of personal agency and organizational dynamics in a self-referential set of relationships operating within a changing environment. Actions, be they words or deeds, provoke responses which provide feedback in an unending flow of consciousness in the same way as interactions in all form of life constantly adapt (Geyer & Rihani, 2010; Stacey, 2010).

The assumption I make is that the experience of FET staff at all levels will reflect behaviour associated with complex adaptive systems (Stacey, 2007). This has profound implications both for leadership and strategy. The key thought to bear in mind when dealing with Complex Adaptive thinking is that it is a theory giving (partial) explanation as to why things happen in the way they do. It is not primarily a theory on which to plan human action. Rather, it helps to interpret and understand with hindsight. Moreover, for the student of CAS, it provides an anticipation which sensitizes one to be ready for the anticipated and the unanticipated, the predicted and the unpredicted. Stacy moves the debate in the direction of complex responsivity, putting greater emphasis on the consciousness of the individual agent, and the fact that response is more deliberate than automatic. It implies the filtering of response through learning and emotion and not mere unthinking adaptation. The implications of this for strategy have been well critiqued by Bodhanya (2009), who emphasises the need for strategy to be an on-going critical and future oriented conversation which takes into account changes in the environment and in organisational capacity as soon as they can be detected.

Policy is generally designed with anticipated results growing out of implementation, thus representative of a theory that if we can plan it then we can implement it. When things do not go according to plan, the perceived failures are rationalised, often to locate problems of insufficient resources, insufficient human resources, ineffective training, disaffection, de-

motivation or incompetence of those responsible for implementation. CAS provides a framework for understanding the complex variety of responses which occur in an organization where the leadership makes a serious attempt to interpret and implement policy directives.

It is thus expected that within the FET Colleges at this time, there will be a natural uncertainty due to the significant roll-out of new policy directives as people assimilate this into their interpretations and actions. It will be seen in this research that issues were raised by the student participants who were experiencing the impact of new policy documents being promulgated and new procedures being put in place by Department of Education officials and senior managers.

## FET Competition

The FET sector is one in which competitive forces are at work. There is a certain level of competition between the FET Colleges as individual colleges seek to attract province wide projects to their particular college. There is also competition between the public FET colleges i.e. those which are the focus of this thesis, and private sector providers. The competitive space is thus a complex one, impacted on by both public and private sector sources. They also have to take into account market forces. These include market supply and demand in relation to labour requirements; regulations provided by SAQA; and the market segmentation and the administrative framework provided by the SETAs.

From a government perspective the FET sector is regulated by: (i) each FET College having a designated geographic reach; (ii) a head office which directs potential clients to particular colleges or collaborations of colleges; (iii) financial allocations managed through a process of norms and standards; and (iv), the role of schools in the FET sector.

From a private sector perspective, the FET Colleges are in direct competition with private FET institutions in relation to some of their programmes, especially those governed by the Department of Labour who have an open policy as opposed to those governed through the Department of Education, especially in the implementation of the National Curriculum Vocational, where the FET Colleges enjoy a monopoly.

Given this competitive advantage, the FET Colleges' responsivity could be indicated through,

- The National Curriculum Vocational being viewed as an area of competitive advantage – this is a secured allocation of work.

- Collaboration with industry to ensure that courses are linked to the latest industry demands in an age of constant product and technology innovation.

- The FET staff becoming regarded as experts on learning appropriate to the intermediate phase. This will include efficient and effective up-skilling of intermediate workers on new products and technologies.

- FET colleges providing facilities that are purpose designed for efficient training for which individual companies would not have resources or appropriate spaces.

- FET staff members have the competitive advantage of working with a number of contexts and therefore can develop competency in learning transfer across contexts.

- Industries obviously develop their own internal processes of learning in the context of change in technologies. FET institutions might develop strategies that can be internally supportive of institutional learning, for example, improving mentoring and coaching techniques.

Effective responsive mechanisms are the consequence of strategy which emanates from an institution which understands its competency and capacity constraints, yet which is progressive in its desire to provide quality, focused FET. The awareness of these competency and capacity constraints is a consequence of the organisational ability to learn to adapt.

## Areas of Institutional Challenge

As a consequence of the above situation, the FET Colleges face challenging times. What follows are a sequence of challenges over time which provide the backdrop against which the College staff have been plying their profession. In this section I highlight various challenges which have been created by waves of change in the sector. It is against this background that the teaching programme occurred and the experiences of the participants as reflected in their academic work were situated.

**Mergers and multi- site management**

The policy decisions that forced the closure of many institutions and the merging of others were considered vital to breaking the apartheid structures and reconfiguring all the colleges into multi-site institutions in which the boundaries of the past would be banished. As a result, the various campuses not only had to align with the head office and each other, but also with the communities in which they are situated, particularly in relation to the businesses who have an interest in utilizing their services. Such restructuring requires individuals to find their feet in a new institutional reality without a shared institutional memory and culture. Change dynamics become manifest with insecurities being expressed, usually as comparing the present to an idealistic past, thus leading to uncertainty being expressed. This is described in complexity science which I have referred to in relation to Stacey. When new authority structures are put in place, it takes time for people to come to terms with them. It takes time for a new equilibrium to emerge, which is by definition unpredictable, but influenced dominantly through the values exhibited in the re-configuration dynamics.

Not only did policy force these new institutional configurations, but the nature of training accreditation was also reconfigured by the emergence of the SETAs. Thus, training boards associated with particular trades and industries disappeared and the work associated to them was assumed by the SETAs, which was using the new nomenclature associated with training in the countries from which South Africa was learning to guide transformation.

**Institutional transformation, recapitalization and implementation of new systems (information, finance)**

Institutional transformation, at the time of writing, still has vestiges of merger aftershocks with different campuses having particular affiliations to previous institutional arrangements. Moreover, the realization remains that the FET institutions are not attractive to many learners and are, therefore, in competition with secondary schools which provide a "more academic" curriculum. Central to the transformation process, and in preparation for the National Curriculum Vocational (NCV), the FET Colleges have been provided with significant grant funds for building and facilities development, referred to as recapitalization. Significant discretion was given to the individual colleges to define their recapitalization

projects in order for them to be best able to meet the challenges they confronted. Many Colleges spent considerable resources on building central administration facilities followed by new workshops and some classrooms and libraries.

At the same time a standardized set of institutional systems were established and implemented, thus giving a framework of conformity. The intention was that this would be easier for training and co-ordination purposes. These include finance, human resource management and student support services.

**Governance and institutional autonomy**

Governance and institutional autonomy policy changes entrenched college councils and provided a degree of institutional autonomy to the separate colleges under the legal responsibility of the college council. Until the end of 2008, all FET staff members were employees of the Provincial Department of Education, but as part of this process, the staffing model was reconfigured with the intention that staff would become employees of the particular college where they worked, under the authority of the rector. This necessitated staff to make a choice. They could either become employees of the individual FET colleges under the governance of a council or had to remain in the employ of the Provincial Department of Education and be redeployed out into "academic" schools or other Department of Education posts. This was a difficult time for members of staff as they had to weigh up the many implications.

One of the consequences of this institutional autonomy and realignment of staff is an inconsistency of salary scales and benefits throughout all the FET Colleges, which has led to a particularly disruptive manifestation of discontent in some colleges.

Furthermore, in addition to discrepancies in remuneration, lecturers were being employed on different conditions of service, another unintended consequence of the divisive cultures in the FET Colleges. The management found themselves in confrontation with the unions as this dilemma took root. This had a spill-over effect on other activities, disrupting the smooth flow of teaching and learning. Thus, a conducive environment for organizational change became impossible.

**Re-curriculating, curriculum transformation and training methodology**

Re-curriculating and curriculum transformation, including training methodology as a process, has had a major impact on the FET institutions, especially between 2007 and 2010. In order to conform to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the sector has had to move from the National Technical Education Qualification (NATED) curriculum, a pre-transformation approach, to the National Curriculum Vocational (NCV). Moreover, to populate this new system, the national DoE has, as an intervention, taking into account the national skills shortages profiles, provided an extensive bursary programme designed to attract post grade 9 learners into the vocational streams offered through the NCV. At present, this project, with its three year programmes, is providing the major income stream to the FETCs. The programmes require a practical experience component, which requires a variety of responses, including workplace visits and FETC based simulations. These programmes are supported by a bursary scheme and are initially attractive to students who already have a grade 12 qualification. Although students are required to revert to a grade 10 programme, they hope that this will lead to opportunities to enter the workforce, something their academic grade 12 has not been successful in doing.

However, one of the problems that arose within this new curriculum framework was the low pass rates of students participating in these programmes. The students, many of them bursary holders, considered the programmes burdensome as they were repeating grades, yet not achieving good results. This fostered a general attitude of negativity among students.

Thus, while new curricula were devised with the best intentions to facilitate transformation and provide appropriate skills, the uptake was generally disappointing.

**Institutional funding and market alignment**

The FET Colleges have moved to a programme-based funding formula, which is directly related to their implementation of new programmes under the National Curriculum Vocational (NCV). Thus institutional funding and market alignment has been dominated by the NCV. The NCV has to be seen in the context of the NQF, AsgiSA and JIPSA. These

programmes together form a raft for the floating of a range of new options designed to stimulate economic development.

Additional funding streams flow from the running of short skills based programmes for the Department of Labour, from learnerships and from running NATED courses. Those managers who participated in this research and who worked directly with funding indicated that while in most cases the funding is sufficient, the flow of funds precipitate cash flow crises because of the time lags between expenditure timeframes at the FET Colleges and the arrival of remittances from the government. This was more evident in the smaller colleges, particularly those with boarding facilities. These cash flow problems exacerbate the stress levels of staff and add to the uncertainty in the institutional environment.

Opportunities in the South African economy were identified through research undertaken by the Department of Labour in 2007 through the publication of the National Scarce Skills Lists 2007, which was prepared through interaction with the intermediaries in skills development and the Sector Education and Training Authorities. These skill shortages are presented as those which are hampering growth and development in South Africa, with the logic that particular competencies are required where the market has identified a lack of particular skills, as a constraining factor. Therefore, providing people with the appropriate skills will have the effect of unlocking potential for business growth and development. This was negotiated with relevant government departments, namely Labour, Education, Home Affairs, Public Enterprises, Science and Technology and Trade and Industry and informed the JIPSA strategy. This also fed into an organising framework of occupations used in the drafting of the five year skills development plans. This framework is used to identify and forecast skills shortages.

It is claimed that one purpose of the list is

> ” for the Department of Education and public education and training institutions, the national list provides a set of indicators for course development and career guidance that should be provided to learners and communities, including schools, FET Colleges, Universities, Universities of Technology and learners across these institutions” (DoL., 2007 p 3).

The implication of this is that institutions, FET institutions in the case of this thesis, are expected to be responsive to the demands presented in the document. This requires identifying labour gaps in a market, obtaining development resources, developing programmes, marketing, recruiting students, mediating access into institutions and facilitating the movement from learning to work. None of these are trivial pursuits and all affect the training/absorption quantity and ratio. They are expressions of institutional competency and affect institutional capacity.

**Alignment between the FET and Higher Education**

A new policy, which is still in the planning stage, is for the FET Colleges to play a similar role as the community colleges in the US whereby the first year of University education would be offered on FET campuses. The linkage between FET and Higher Education is a consequence of the vision behind the National Qualifications Framework, which was to articulate the system in such a way that one could enter and exit the system at different times yet maintain a trajectory in one's learning leading all the way to Doctoral studies. It also implies some university qualification credits could potentially be offered through programmes run at FET Colleges where, on satisfactory completion, studies could be continued at university.

To achieve this, direct links of continuity need to be established and careful thought must to be given to the crossover.

**Regime shift**

In considering the cumulative effects that all the above changes have had on the FET Sector, it is possible to speak of a comprehensive regime shift. Although change can be rationalized and anticipated in organizations, the actual nature of the change is dynamic. While certain acts such as restructuring, governance mechanisms and curriculum can be mandated, the consequences cannot be predicted. Furthermore, organisational transformation is difficult and comes at a cost, despite the best intentions of policy makers, a cost which is often borne by those closest to the ground. This argument is supported by (Folke et al., 2002 p 438), who claim that *"although we understand regime shifts retrospectively, it is difficult to predict them in advance"*. An assumption that change is linear and can be directed will inevitably lead to unpredictable outcomes, sometimes unpleasant.

The complex adaptive and complex responsive views of organisations thus provide an alternative interpretation to organizational behaviour in which it is assumed that there is a big picture or whole system in which individuals are accommodated. However, this perspective is based on the assumption that organizations are externally planned and certain policies are imposed on the organization to achieve specific purposes. Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), more specifically Complex Responsive Systems (CRS), provide a framework for understanding the complex variety of responses which occur in an organization where those in leadership positions make a serious attempt to interpret and implement policy directives. From an institutional perspective, it underscores the need for managers and leaders to build new dynamic capabilities to energise and lead their organisations.

## Building responsive institutional capacity in the FET sector

From an economic perspective, responsiveness is a demand side driven economic model. However, this needs to be considered in the context of the developmental state where a certain amount of contrivance is seen as legitimate, especially within the framework of transformation. FET Colleges are thus expected to respond to the implications of social policy in the developmental state as it relates to job enhancement, new venture creation and workplace retention and expansion. This underscores the emphasis placed in this thesis on new partnerships and connective leadership.

The FET Colleges in South Africa have been mandated through policy to be responsive institutions in the provision of Further Education and Training. This implies that these institutions are to be at the forefront of preparing youth and adults for opportunities in the South African economy in a way that is fine tuned in ensuring that those who have completed their training will be absorbed into the workforce and thus better their quality of life.

The waves of change have been substantial in the FET Sector in South Africa. Managers and other staff have had to manage a raft of policy based changes, including mergers and multi-site management, institutional transformation through recapitalisation, implementation of new systems (information, marketing, finance), governance and institutional autonomy re-curriculating, as well as transformation of curriculum, training models, methodology and institutional funding. However, the key element in change is the mind-sets of people and

their perceptions of what the challenges are and what they individually and collectively can do. This moves the challenge to being one of leadership.

In confronting this leadership challenge, I suggest three alternative routes that might evolve depending on the dominance of different political persuasions. I do not draw this from any source, but my own imagination. The first is a structured approach, the second an entrepreneurial approach and the third, a partnership approach drawing on the best of both of the others. This is intended to hold our thinking in tension as we further consider the partnership route. The table which follows positions these three approaches by considering their philosophical orientations, the implied selection processes, funding models, outputs, major downsides, staff implications and job creation potential.

| Core assumptions | Structured approach | Partnership Approach | Entrepreneurial Approach |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Philosophical political orientation** | Government will play a dominant role in managing the sector with a substantial level of centralism and coordination. | Government will emphasise the social contract between the stakeholders and emphasize national goals through incentivised social contracts. | Government will more and more move training into the private sector. |
| **Selection process** | It is possible to determine student intake through careful data analysis. | Through getting to know the potential client bodies in the community served by the College, partnership agreements can be made. | The environment will be continuously scanned for opportunities for funded training projects |
| **Funding** | Funding streams can be secured through the SETA's, Government Departments and Projects | Funding is secured through the SETA and the client partners. | The College will run as a business and contract and expand in relation to market forces and entrepreneurial competency. |
| **Output** | The selection, throughput and placement of students is a linear process which can be managed. | Selected students will have an ongoing relationship with their likely employer. | Output will be eclectic as a consequence of the variety brought in through the entrepreneurial approach. |
| **Major downside** | Dependency on government funding and SETA data | Does not take into account potential students outside of government. | Highly volatile as a dominant strategy |
| **Staffing implications** | Staff planning will be longer term thus lending stability. Relationships will be structural rather than personal. | Staff will need to be involved in the partnership arrangement and will therefore need the requisite skills and attitudes | Staff will need to exhibit substantial flexibility with a client supplier orientation. |
| **Implications for job** | An emphasis on macro projects through | An emphasis on growth and expansion in the private | An emphasis on projects which stimulate new |

| creation | government tenders for large infrastructure and public works type projects | sector | venture creation and entrepreneurship. |

**Table 3 : Approaches to Change**

## Fitness Landscapes

A further dimension of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) is the concept of fitness landscapes (Geyer & Rihani, 2010; Stacey, 2007, 2010). A fitness landscape is the situation and context in which an organization is operating. To my way of thinking, the metaphor of a seascape would be more appropriate as it conveys the idea of constant motion, but with conditions changing through times of calm and times of storm. Nevertheless, the fitness dimension is the extent to which the situation or environment is conducive to the growth of the institution, bearing in mind that this environment is dynamic, complex and adaptive. The notion of responsivity is associated with complexity. It assumes a profound understanding of the opportunities embedded in a context and implies an ability and eagerness to make the most of them.

Continuing with my metaphor of a seascape, one would have to consider the initial conditions influencing the work of the FET Colleges and whether they provide a conducive environment for the colleges to fulfil the transformational goals imposed on them by the new policies. One needs to clearly articulate the need for FET and the institutions and individuals for which the service is intended. Thus, there would be clarity on who needs training and what kinds of training are required. Issues of access and funding and clear cut processes for admission and placement would be put in place.

However, it is not all calm sailing as there are a number of forces at work within this dynamic seascape. While an attempt is being made to use training to contribute towards a better fit between the skills available to the labour market and opportunities to be employed, the situation is frustrated by the levels of unemployment and disillusionment with the sector. While government has initiated policy intended to pull the labour economy through incentivising training (the skills levy), the systemic impact has been unfavourable to date. Further policy direction to intervene more specifically, albeit in partnership with business, has been to identify areas of potential growth where intermediate skills are

required, such as the building industry. This has led to large numbers entering the NCV but results to date are disappointing, leading to staff disillusionment.

The seascape is also influenced by the impact of globalization which internationalizes the competitive forces in which local business operates and thus the way in which labour is utilized. It would be more conducive if there was a greater understanding of the areas of competitive and comparative advantage in the territories served by different colleges, thus allowing them to be more responsive in contexts where growth opportunity is possible, such as where new industrial clusters are in formation. Clusters are situations through which the supply chains associated with particular industries tend to congregate around the end product developers with an intensification that grows as more businesses are attracted to the cluster, including seeming competitors, who between them are able to develop more nuanced product offerings.

In the current seascape, members of staff feel adrift and insecure as a consequence of the change in employment structure where the FET colleges have become their employers rather than the Department of Education. By making the colleges independent of each other, each agent in the system only has contact with a limited number of others in the system. In these interrelationships the interpretations of the individual are exercised through personal values and previously learned behaviour. Thus, numerous interconnected interpretations and behaviours are happening as a consequence of people interacting and prescribing meaning to their own interactions. Here the concept of strategic responsiveness is suggested to describe the integration of the various strands of influence that can be conceptualised in modelling the complex patterns that might be emergent within the FET institutions and which influence the way they go about doing their work. It is in this context that FET managers and teachers are attempting to craft their professional and institutional identities.

In order to achieve a fit with its seascape, an institution needs to develop the appropriate dynamic capabilities. Eisenhardt et al., (2000 p 1106), describe these as;

> *"The firm's processes that use resources – specifically the processes to integrate, reconfigure, gain and release resources – to match and even create market change. Dynamic capabilities thus are the organisational and strategic routines by*

*which firms achieve new resource configurations as markets emerge, collide, split,*

*evolve and die."*

In the FET Colleges, I would envisage these dynamic capabilities as being those leadership actions facilitating the change and transformation described by Stacy, (2010) as a process of transformative causality with,

*"Movement towards a future that is perpetually constructed by the movement itself as continuity and transformation, the known and the unknown, all at the same time*

*Movement in order to express continuity and transformation of individual and collective identity*

*The process of movement/cause is local interaction forming and being informed by population-wide patterns*

*The nature of variation/change is diverse micro interaction and escalation of small changes.*

*Freedom and constraint arise in the diversity of micro interactions under conflicting constraints."* (p 58)

It is my understanding that the process of leadership in organisations, if drawn from the CAS perspective, involves the leader attempting to focus thinking around dominant core ideas which give meaning to the organisation's purpose. This could be facilitated through dialogue and working towards a sense of greater certainty in the minds of individuals through validating their interpretations and contributions. However, this is easier said than done when leaders themselves do not understand the dynamics which they and their followers are experiencing.

Lichtenstein et al., (2006, p 2) describe the leadership process in Complex Adaptive Systems as;

*"Expanding the locus of leadership from the isolated, role- based actions of individuals to the innovative, contextual interactions that occur across an entire social system;*

*Extending current theory and practice by focussing on micro-strategic leadership actions across all organisational levels and across organizational boundaries;*

*Increasing the relevance and accuracy of leadership theory by exploring how leadership outcomes are based on complex interactions, rather than "independent" variables;*

*Highlighting the relational foundations of change in emerging organisational fields, through the idea that leadership occurs in the "spaces between" agents;*

*Providing a new and rich foundation for explaining the constructive process of collective action as well as the influential "behaviours" of collective actors;*

*Connecting to innovative methodologies that can enrich our understanding of how leadership gets enacted and received in complex environments."*

I have identified aspects of the FET College work into three categories, namely that which is simple, that which is complicated and that which is complex, in order to explain what I consider complex and through which complex adaptive responses emerge.

| Aspect of programme | Simple | Complicated | Complex |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Focus** | The logic is deceptively simple – the FET Colleges must work with all organisations which are expected to have workplace skills audits and plans in place, as well as with other initiative generative of job opportunities e.g. Local Economic Development projects, public works programmes. | The issue is complicated by the number of actors, (organisations, SETA's, Private Providers etc), the time-spans and qualification time frames,  the availability of training resources, both physical and human and the funding arrangements. | Different levels of efficiency influencing the reliability of data, the lack of coordinating mechanisms, fluctuations in the economy, changes in technologies, demographic and spatial issues all lead to unintended consequences such as inertia. |
| **Divergent and convergent perspectives** | Understand and elucidate the various requirements for the system of FET to function. Business and industry want a reliable stream of qualified workers. The FET College wants to right size and skill itself to provide efficient and effective throughput for efficacious labour flow. Government requires the growth of employment with the social benefits of economic inclusion. | The literature points out the need for developing mutuality of purpose and transparency in agendas. While this might be possible in broad strokes – all want the economy to grow, the devil is in the detail as a result of differing organisational cultures, revenue streams, and timelines. | Be aware that these divergences and convergences will lead to unintended outcomes and provoke ongoing dynamical interaction. Stereotyping and attitudes can derail the process and prohibit the development of sufficient social capital. |
| **Governance** | The FET College Council is expected to be | Each participating organisation will have | A more holistic form of governance will need to be |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | representative of the various stakeholders and provide the necessary framework for purpose, operations and output. This requires a high demand on data and management performance. | governance requirements particular to itself which complicates the requirements they have of the data and management processes of the FET Council. Differing patterns of accountability and mandate will need to be built in. | accommodated as it emerges to incorporate different perspectives and levels of commitment and participation. This will place greater emphasis on leadership, and the development of connective leadership in particular. |
| **Clarification of the domain** | The purpose of viewing the domain is to identify individual organisation boundary indicators and build arguments which indicate what purposes can be better served through building common goals. | Redraw boundaries to see the composite boundary indicators of all the institutional partners. Develop a linking language to facilitate inter-organisational thinking. | Expect new perspectives to emerge and new adaptations will need to be confronted which will facilitate a more holistic understanding of the domain and the wicked problems associated with it. |
| **Accommodation of institutional goals** | These can be derived and indicators designed for the various partners individually. | Areas of similarity and difference between indicators can be identified and appreciated. Goals for the partnership itself can be identified and integrated with the various partner goals. | Conflicting goal expectations can give rise to conflictual or creative dynamics which lead to innovative new learning within institutions individually and collectively. |
| **Success factors** | Success factors for individual institutions can be identified and attributed to the partnership.<br><br>For the college this will be improved throughput with firm placements.<br><br>For businesses and industries it will be competent available workers. For government it will be the creation of decent jobs. | Different success factors can be juxtaposed and partnership goals set to deal specifically with flows and throughput. | Overall success or failure will be greater than the sum of the individual success factors resulting in societal learning. Success will be indicated by societal value creation in the form of a more productive, creative, motivated, committed and growing workforce.<br><br>The social contract can grow. |
| **Differing cultures, resources and attributes** | Individual organisational profiles can be ascertained. | Individual organisational profiles can be juxtaposed and leverages identified.. | New competencies can be learned from reflexive engagement. |
| **Creativity, innovation and interference** | Identification of factors contributing to the innovation or interference can be identified institutionally. | The generative (positive or negative) potential of various interactions can be investigated. In this way new resources can be created and new opportunities investigated. | Critical tipping points in the interrelationship can be identified and scrutinized, leading to new programmes, new sites and new resource flows. |

| Values positions | Values and ethical behaviour associated with each institution can be defined and differences identified. | Comparative methodologies can be employed to map the broader values and ethical terrain and to define the ethical dilemmas. | Values conflicts which emerge will need to be identified and possibilities for developing mutual understanding resolution sought. The dialogue around work and economic participation can be informed. |
|---|---|---|---|

**Table 4 : FET Institutional Logic**

The table places particular emphasis on issues relating to the partnership building challenges that have to be confronted.

## Conclusion

This chapter has added to the quest to understand the history of the FET sector and how it impacts on the current organisational identity and capacity challenges facing the FET Colleges. It also expresses the challenges that the institutions face as a consequence of their merging, restructuring and re-curriculating. The chapter draws on the literature to explain the type of complexity which is being experienced in the institutions at present and underscores the challenges that have to be faced in becoming responsive organisations able and committed to building the necessary stakeholder relationships essential for building strong partnerships.

It concludes by providing an appreciation of the difference between the simple, complicated and complex challenges that need to be faced in building a partnership culture and competency.

It is acknowledged that the research needs to be followed by work which concentrates on the business and community perspectives. However, the intention is to focus in on the FET Colleges to provide introspection and awareness of the competencies required to take a lead role in the transformation potential, taking into account the difficulties and challenges associated with institutional transformation. The colleges will then be able to take up the role as partnership brokers authentically, and research done at that stage could be designed to facilitate and learn from the process of partnership brokering. Effective brokering is core to partnership building (Hardman, 2011) and, as teaching and learning is the core business of

the FET Colleges, it behoves the FET College management to take the lead role in brokering (Tennyson and Wilde, 2000).

# Chapter 3

## The Challenge of Teaching and Learning about Responsivity through New Partnerships

### Introduction

In considering the questions I have posed in this thesis about the FET sector, I have indicated the importance of living theory to me and how it provides an underpinning logic. I have indicated how systems thinking emphasises holism, connectivity and the critical examination of the way in which boundaries are drawn. In this chapter, I provide the conceptual framework for a value system based on the potential value created by new partnerships. It is a value system which uses as its key word, partnership, and emphasises the need for communication and the reframing of the complex problems involved in rethinking employment and employability, and the potential that the FET Colleges have to contributing to transformation. I have been a reader of the literature that has emerged around partnerships and this has significantly influenced the values base of my living theory. However, this has been done critically and is not faddish, but reflective of the benefits to be derived from reconsidering problem situations taking into account the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders.

From my perspective as reflective practitioner and advocate of living theory, new partnerships create the space for dialogue and social planning about issues of deep significance and which involve a range of stakeholders. In the case of the stakeholders in the FET colleges, namely staff, students, employees and potential employees, SETAs, government and community organisations dealing with youth and unemployment, there is common ground for finding solutions to youth unemployment as it impacts on them all in different ways. Thus, my living theory requires an understanding of the issues and dynamics surrounding such communication in order for me to articulate them into my practice. This space must allow for new ideas with commitments to achieve stakeholder determined goals. This will result in programmes of action that are not merely contractual in that the partners have a business arrangement, but will be social in that there will be an expectation of value to society in the form of economic participation leading to greater human well-being

## Contemporary New Partnership Thinking as an Emergent Phenomena

The concept of new partnerships is deeply embedded in contemporary language with Googins and Rochlin, (2000) even speaking of the partnership society. There are many words, both nouns and verbs which could serve as synonyms which nuance the concept in various ways. Key among these words are ***collaboration and collaborators***, emphasising a close relationship focusing on a common goal; ***synergy,*** where the emphasis is on combining energies; ***compatibility***, with an emphasis on the awareness of difference and the power that can be released if this diversity is used for creativity; and ***co-commitment*** as an implied strength. Another perspective would emphasise a contractual arrangement, namely a partnership. These are but a few of the repertoire of comparative synonyms.

In the last twenty years, the word partnership has become of political platform rhetoric with an implied emphasis on solidarity in purpose. However, behind the scenes of partnership talk, one is aware of the possibility of trade-offs being made, coercion being applied as well as the option of reaching consensus. The development of this field has been an area of study in which I have immersed myself for the last 15 years and is recorded in my reflective writing about my own career development.

Thus, I have followed the emergence of an ontology, epistemology and practice of partnerships and have made it an area of enquiry in which I have become involved. The application of partnerships is not only in education (where I first encountered it), but also in aid, development, natural resources management and business. I recognise that the concept often takes on political implications through encompassing a hidden dependency in relation to power dynamics. Ideally, mutual accountability between partners with clearly defined roles and resource utilisation procedures should be in place.

Thus, given the prevalence of its usage, and the variety of contexts to which it has been applied, it is no wonder that a broad literature has developed particularly around partnership application, advocacy, theory, methodology, evaluation and critique. In order to differentiate these emergent phenomena from earlier times when partnerships referred mainly to the legal sense of professional association, the concept of ***new partnerships*** is preferred. It is manifest in various ways, with the most familiar being Public Private Partnerships, Education Business Partnerships and Cross-Sector Partnerships. It is in relation

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to this new partnership thinking that I develop the concept of responsivity. My conceptualization, however, also draws heavily on my understanding of systems thinking, which emphasizes interconnectivity and systemic feed-back as dominant characteristics. However, the fundamental premises of new partnerships is to find mutual grounds for building collaborative practices which are of benefit to the organisations that are in partnership, where their own individual purposes are met and where the activity framed as "the partnership" extends beyond what each is able to do in their individual capacity. In new partnership, this relationship is philosophized as having intrinsic merit through the alignment of values and effort between the sectors.

It is in the light of the above that I quote from Robert Davies, the then CEO of the Prince of Wales Business Leader's Foundation, a leading advocate for new partnerships, who said:

> *"People of the 20th century have witnessed the widest spectrum ever of approaches to social and economic development. It has been a time of competing ideologies, with ideological extremism leading to devastating, bleak and inhuman episodes. While there have been unimaginable strides in the quality of life and increased prosperity for many, the century has also seen threats on a massive scale for poverty, social exclusion, environmental depletion and fear.*
>
> *As we turn the corner to the 21st century, and ideologies to date having proved inadequate masters of our destiny, it is hardly surprising that the comparatively new concept of 'partnership' based on collaboration and consultation should become the mantra of the new millennium* (Davies, R. in R. Tennyson, 1998 p 3).

A caveat to the almost ideological evangelism associated with new partnerships in some quarters, particularly in the neo-liberal discourse, is that there is a strong awareness of the difficulties associated with new partnerships, which will be indicated in a number of ways. Thus, we have the suggestion that the jury might still be out on the critical question of co-exploration or co-exploitation (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011).

Much emphasis has been placed on partnerships as spaces for innovation and learning. Thus, one finds the following forms of reasoning;

> *"Organisations pursue partnerships for many reasons. There are simple demand-*
> *and-supply responses where possibly a monopoly provider status means that the*

*customer has little choice and possibly little motivation to seek training through*
*other avenues. At another level, partnerships are a strategy to pool capital, to*
*build scale, to share or reduce risk, to reach new customers or to access new*
*technologies. More recently, organisations of all types have looked to partnerships*
*for the opportunity to learn, to acquire new skills and knowledge, as well as the*
*more traditional motivations of securing additional income"* (Callan, 2004, p. 12).

In writing about the health sector, Lovelace et al., indicate that public health in the 21st
Century calls for building,

*"a new generation of inter-sectoral partnerships that draw on the perspectives*
*and resources of diverse communities and actively engage them in health actions*
*that enhance and facilitate communication within the public health system"*
(Lovelace et al., 2009 p 428).

The reasons given by Callan emphasise a maximisation of assets as the rationale for
partnerships. Lovelace, however, goes further in her comment in that she advocates
partnerships for learning through better facilitation communication, community
engagement and collaborative action. However, they both emphasise the diversity of
professionals involved, the variety of settings in which they operate, the complexity of
referral systems and different institutional capacities. It is my contention that education and
skills development in the pursuit of economic development requires an appreciation of a
similar complexity through the interlinking of different work-sites, policies and skills
development practitioners within different industrial, commercial and service sectors and
that the different  emphases placed by the above writers are both important.

However, there is a significant critique of partnerships concerning their meaning, process
and effectiveness, emphasising the need for a research base. In my reference to it, I request
the reader to note that the discourse uses different formulations of "partnership", through
various combinations e.g. cross-sector partnerships. It will be noted that I attempt to draw
the reader towards an appreciation of "new partnerships" as encompassing the shift from a
more technical to a more holistic appreciation of the concept. Selsky and Parker (2005)
analyse the research-based needs of cross-sector partnerships as growing in use, but poorly
understood. They understand the main research challenge as growing out of the different
definitions of partnership, the different purposes embedded in partnerships and their

transactional or developmental nature. For example, new partnerships are often assumed as conventional practice in corporate social responsibility, whereas the problems they are allegedly engaging with are deeply seated environmental and social ills. They are seen to be applied in different contexts with different configurations of stakeholders and are often managed as projects. They are located in different discipline contexts, namely public policy, public administration, non-profit organisations, organisational studies, education, economics, healthcare and environmentalism. Selsky and Parker (2005) suggest three primary platforms on which new partnerships are built, namely: (i) resource dependence; (ii) social issues (p 851); and (iii) societal sectors (p 853). Resource dependence would imply the sharing of resources for greater impact; social issues involves respecting different perspectives as complementary and societal sectors implies the need for collaborative effort through better appreciation of sector capabilities.

I argue therefore, for critically considering the emergence of new partnerships as a form of social contract, which has come about as a consequence of deep frustration in the imbalances between business, government and civil society, leading to deepening distortions in the economy and its governance and impact. Thus, for me, partnerships are about improving processes in society which happens as a consequence of mindful engagement between the sectors. It is for this reason that, in my own work, I have developed a generic curriculum around new partnership applications and have worked with various students in differently nuanced applications. I have considered partnerships as a phenomenon (theory) and as an approach (practice). As a phenomenon, I enquire into why this has come about, how it is manifest in the world and what theoretical perspectives help us to understand and explain it, what effect it is having and how is it being applied. As a methodological approach, I have considered the deeply rooted problems which exist in contemporary society and how these have to be addressed from a variety of perspectives. New partnerships provide a framework for systemic theory buildings and integrated practice.

**The FET Colleges and partnerships**

The FET Colleges are mandated to work within a framework of partnering between education and employer organisations and are thus required to be able to understand the

school to work interface (Lewis, 2005) and incorporate it into their learning. This implies adapting their learning programmes to the needs of the market, being innovative to accommodate changes in the market, and performing to a level where learners can flow into the workplace with competence and acceptance. In South Africa, this requires an understanding of the South African workplace and although continuous accommodation to the international marketplace is essential, what is happening in other countries cannot be directly applied to the South African context (McGrath et al., 2006).

In this chapter, my purpose is to consider new partnerships as applied to FET and to draw on the literature and my experience to articulate this into my living theory. The themes I will cover will be (i) partnerships as a personal professional philosophical framework; (ii) organisational competencies; (iii) partnerships as exhibiting systemic and complexity characteristics; (iv) partnerships and the formation of social capital; (v) partnerships for innovation; (vi) partnership intelligences; (vii) partnership leadership; and then (viii) partnership evaluation.  I will then consider some of the latest research on partnership critique.

## Partnerships as a personal philosophical framework

The first premise of my living theory in relation to the FET Colleges and their responsivity through partnerships is that, in relation to the kind of work the FET Colleges do, professionals in the sector need to appreciate the need for thinking about their work as it relates to the various institutions of society and the deeply embedded social problems within society as a whole which impact on those institutions. It is not just about building competencies, but rather about seeing how those competencies assist the learner to engage in the world of work and building the institutional capacity and enabling conditions for this to occur. Thus, the opportunities offered in the workplace organisations have to be considered within the individual's frame of reference. Moreover, the realisation of the importance of employability for family and community well-being needs to be kept in mind.

It was during my enrolment in the Cambridge Programme for Industry Post-Graduate Certificate (2005) in Cross-Sector partnerships that I engaged in new partnership thinking in a more intensive and academic way. Prior to that, my engagement had been primarily through involvement with the NGO sector in South Africa, which was often based on inter-

relationships between funders and organisations operating in covert political space in order to ameliorate in situations created by the adverse impacts of the apartheid state. A later phase in NGO development resulted in more overt operations intended to facilitate regime change. Thereafter, I was significantly influenced by the engagement between education, business and the community in the UK, USA, Canada, Norway and Australia, where partnerships were based on extending the school curriculum in a number of ways, most notably for me, being the school to work transition. I was particularly impressed by learners being engaged with the workplace as a means of experiential learning rather than classroom based career guidance. The Cambridge programme placed new partnerships squarely within the broader debate around the triple bottom line of the emergent practice of governance for sustainability, emphasising the interconnectedness of the environmental, economic and social spheres. The emphasis was on understanding the dynamics between government, business and civil society in the co-construction of policy and practice.

This led to the need to critique my understanding of the institutional dimensions of society, the interrelationships between them as well as the potential of productive collaboration. The author who made most impact on me at the time was Perlas (2000) and his argument about the changing dynamics between the sectors within the broader international sphere post the cold war and with the emergence of globalisation, although this was soon nuanced for me through Waddell (2002, 2005) and his analysis of the sectors.

The argument I have developed is that society has embedded within it a variety of institutional forms with three dominant forms being recognised, namely organisations in the public, private and civil sectors. It becomes "natural" – using our mental models – to view problem situations as originating from and belonging to one or other sector with the competency base associated with that sector. Partnership thinking, while appreciating this, challenges us to think of combinations of competencies and reframing problem situations. Within South Africa, these sectors have, as they relate to the FET sector, very distinctive social histories.

New partnership thinking starts with this recognition that society has the three primary sectors indicated above, (Perlas, 2000) and that the interrelationships between them, referred to by Perlas as three-folding, are a valid field of study. The consequence is

heightened awareness of organisational and sector identities and their histories, and has led to research on institutional and organisational resources, capabilities, competencies and other unique features (Waddell, 2002, 2005). The new partnership field explores how these distinctive competencies can be used in combination to address complex problems. This reflects a phenomenological approach, which recognises the complexity of social problems and appreciates the multi-connectedness of humans in the world and the variety of often disconnected, but well intentioned solutions to these problems. A critical appreciation of partnership formations and the implications for theory and practice is a field of contemporary study. What has in fact been happening has been a profound rethinking about institutional identity, purpose and character, and the concomitant competencies. This highlights the construct of the nuanced social histories of organisations and the impact of profound forces of change on them.

Within this conceptualisation, a contemporary emergent approach identifies and critically appraises the institutions materialising in the sectors. These manifestations are never "pure" and discrete, but constantly evolve through interaction and learning. This creates the ever-changing variations and hybrids which constitute contemporary society. Thus, government, the public sector, will draw on the efficiency of private sector models in creating Public-Private-Partnerships (Perlas, 2000). Moreover, humans inhabit a great variety of institutions and organisations and have complex, layered, relational identities as a consequence. The individual is an individual, a citizen and an economic being all at the same time. These are perspectives on an integrated being.

This understanding of institutional life and the need to find new and appropriate ways of connecting and designing new forms of collaboration is at the root of my living theory. My living contradictions grow from the difficulties of confronting this and my limited ability to influence the emergence in which it is embedded.

**Organisational competencies**

My second premise is that partnerships are able to build new social constructs through using the contrasting resources and competencies embedded in the different sectors to build new resource configurations. When a problem context or situation is viewed from a particular organisational perspective, certain aspects of the problem will be highlighted

depending on the way in which the organisational representatives view the problem situation. Their perspective will be restricted by their mental models or schemata and will reflect that which they observe in the environment. The implication is that their perspective will be restricted, partial and provisional. However, from this perspective they will usually adopt a tacit theory about how to engage with the problem. Other individuals from that same organisation will view the problem situation from their own individual perspective. Because of the similar frame of reference, one assumes there will be some correlation between the views expressed by stakeholders coming from the same organisation and the sector of which it is a representative. By implication, individuals from a different organisation, representative of a different sector, will have a different take on a problem situation. Their thinking will be clustered around constructs appropriate to their perspective. Thus, drawing broadly on the partnership literature one is able to provide a typology of institutional epistemologies appropriate to the dominant forms of organisational identity. Further, organisational identity is closely aligned with organisational purpose. It is this institutional typology that points to the core epistemology underpinning partnership.

| Sector | State Sector | Market Sector | Civil Sector |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Primary interest** | Political | Economic | Social |
| **Primary control agents** | Voters/ rulers, | Owners | Communities |
| **Primary power form** | Laws, police, fines | Money | Traditions, values |
| **Primary goals** | Societal order | Wealth creation | Expressions of values |
| **Assessment frame** | Legality | Profitability | Justice |
| **Goods produced** | Public | Private | Group |
| **Dominant organizational form** | Governmental | For-profit | Non-profit |
| **Relationship** | Rules | Transactions | Values |

| basis | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Temporal framework** | Election cycles | Profit reporting/ business cycles | Sustainability/ regeneration cycles |
| **Operating ethic** | Administrative | Managerial | Developmental |

**Table 5 : Waddell's comparative attributes of the sectors (2002 p 48)**

Even a cursory glance at the above table must alert one to the difficulty of ascribing a simple identity to the FET Colleges. While the members of staff were in the employ of the Department of Education, it was fairly clear that the FET Colleges were government institutions. However, my understanding of the intent of making them independent legal institutions is recognition of a more nuanced role. Thus, although they are located in a para-governmental space, they are primarily cross-cutting institutions which are meant to develop a business culture. As brokering organisations, their role is to broker partnerships between organisations in order to facilitate targeted training.

As a consequence of the dominant worldview embedded in organisations and institutions representative of the sectors, they intentionally develop particular competencies as a mechanism for engaging with the world. These competencies will be restricted to accommodate the world as perceived through the organisational lens. Moreover, each organisation reflects its identity in its strategy and purpose.

The above line of thought, while emphasising competencies, does not engage with competency as implying effectiveness, efficacy, efficiency, ethicality and elegance. Thus an organisation might be highly competent or highly incompetent in developing and applying its competencies.

An understanding of forms and dynamics of institutional power and the application of distinctive resources is important in working in the partnership field. It is the potential dynamic of inter-organisational (inter-agency) collaboration that provides the unique dynamism for addressing complex problem situations which require comprehensive co-ordination (Cross, Newman-Gonchar, & Fagan, 2009). Inter-organisational collaboration requires strategic alliance building and requires a learning imperative for knowledge transfer. Thus,

> *"Strategic alliances are considered an organisational learning imperative because organizationally embedded knowledge cannot be easily blueprinted and exchanged through market transactions"* (Cross, et al. 2009, p 415).

Cross et al., point out that the performance of alliances is often disappointing, using words such as *"unstable", ineffective"* and *"poorly performing"*, as a consequence of opportunism because of the competitive nature of knowledge acquisition and transfer. They refer to a new stream of research *"that explores the ecology of learning organisations, the dynamics of learning alliances and evolutionary collaborative processes"* (p 416) in order to develop trust, social capital formation and learning efficiency. The shift is from an economic theory of transaction cost of the partnership to one of social exchange in which the actions of one party iterate through the accrual of benefits or frustrations associated with sanctions. Trust begets trust and visa-versa. This allows for a focus on what they refer to as "absorptive" capacity influenced by the institutional culture and quality of personnel competencies. Thus,

> *"Absorptive capacity enhances a partner's ability to appropriate the collective knowledge, however low transparency and non-cooperative behaviour of a partner will hinder the inter-firm learning."* "N*arrow self-interest in learning can cause a dysfunctional inter-organizational learning and hinder the learning outcomes"* (Cross et al., 2009 p 417).

Social exchange theory is not transactional in a narrow sense of being accounted for and balanced, but leads to a more generalised sense of trust and mutuality of benefit in the relationship. This in turn leads to a more natural relational growth and reciprocal commitment and possible growth in the risk to benefit ratio. Goldman et al., refer to this relationship as being well connected in the tool they have developed (Goldman, 2008).

What is significant to the partnership relationship in the FET sector is that;

> *"if a partner is not able to inspire the confidence of the other party with its skill and expertise, this would result in negligence or dominating tendencies that are antithetical to collaborative learning. "... "The trustworthy behaviours of a partner are a precondition for an enriched, meaningful and continued exchange of knowledge between alliance partners"(Muthusamy & White, 2005 p 442).*

It is in using the interplay of these attributes as competencies that partnerships derive their strength. However, it is also because of the complexities associated with this interplay that partnerships often exhibit inertia. Thus, cross-sector partnerships are premised on the fact that problems are multi-facetted, and that organizations emerging from the different sectors hold perspectives that need to be held in tension. Moreover, it is likely that participation is not so much a direct philosophical response, but is a more instrumental response brought about by the transformations that are taking place in each sector concurrently as a consequence of the interactive dynamism between them. The multi-national corporate working in a globalized context raises challenges for governments and civil society organisations. Different sectors have different, often contradictory, perspectives on any particular issue, raising the potential for conflict. Partnerships are based on the logic that co-operation is a preferred option because it provides the opportunity for resolution and compromise rather than deepening conflict. It also assumes the combining and focusing of resources and creative energy is a better way than confrontation.

The above view must be contrasted with a broader framework on inter-organisational collaboration. For example, Di Domenico, et al., (2009 p 889) suggest three overlapping theoretical perspectives, namely network, resource based and institutional perspectives.

Network theory assumes that institutions always exist within networks and that this involvement predisposes them to explore further viable opportunities. Di Domenico et al. cites Nohria and Gulati (1994) in this regard;

> "Crucially, embedded relationships enable collaboration to be governed on the basis of relational rather than contractual arrangements and play a critical role in allowing organizations to access new knowledge" (Di Domenico et al., 2009, p 889).

The resource based perspective acknowledges the distinctive competencies of different organisations with an appreciation of the difficulty of creating them for themselves and the desirability of collaborating to share. This requires a re-conceptualisation of relationships beyond mere competitive and inconsequential views.

The institutional change perspective emphasises the generative potential of learning that comes about from close collaboration and the impact that this has on learning within the

collaborating organisations, thus facilitating their own development. Thus, a business working in a community might generate new ideas of products appropriate to a particular segment.

Di Domenico et al. (2009) acknowledge that most of the collaboration literature does not focus on cross-sector collaborations where the different organisational forms are so distinctive and different cultures and purposes make issues of governance deeply problematic. These authors therefore turn to the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and dyadic relationships.  Here the emphasis is on trade involving social goods with an appreciation of normative frameworks. Di Domenico et al. refer to the work of Muthusamy and White.

> *"When each organisation in a dyadic collaboration holds resources (whether economic, political or social) that are deemed valuable by the other partner, the norm of reciprocity becomes established as fundamental to their interaction."*

and,

> *"Collaboration is thus based on mutually beneficial patterns of co-operation that affect and are affected by the access that participants have to resources, their choices between alternative courses of action or reaction, and anticipated outcomes"(Muthusamy & White, 2005 p 891).*

 Critics of the Social Exchange Theory point out those counter-productive relationships can emerge both at the individual and inter-organisational level, especially as issues of power and power relations manifest themselves. Muthusamy and White refer to the dialectical process and suggest that tensions and reactions;

> *"...may result in the creation of new organisational arrangements which incorporate reconciled ideological standpoints or partnership dissonance resulting from the repeated collision of structural forces" (Muthusamy & White, 2005 p 893).*

In applying partnership thinking within the FET College sector it is important to deconstruct the notion of the three sectors. First, the sectors are neither internally cohesive nor coherent, nor are the inter-relationships between them unproblematic. It is well- known that government departments have difficulty in working together, even though they work

within a framework of co-operative government[7]. Second, government, through the alliance between the ANC, COSATU and the Communist Party, has a special relationship with labour. Thus, the relationship between the private sector and government is heavily influenced by the relationship between government and labour. Furthermore, the close relationship between the political party in power, namely the ANC, and government departments, often referred to as "deployment", results in government being significantly nuanced by political issues. Business does not reflect unity within itself as there are various organisations operating as the voice of business. The above situation reflects the ideological challenges within which the FET College sector works.

There are various policy-based resourcing and integrative mechanisms which have been created to assist in creating the framework conditions for the FET sector. These include the integration of qualifications, training providers and training programmes through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), an independent government mandated body; the Sector Education and Training Agencies; workplace skills audits; and skills development levies, all under the authority of the Department of Labour. Then, there is the Department of Education, which funds education programmes which also fall into the FET sector. The FET colleges find themselves at the confluence of these various mechanisms with the inevitable contradictions. What follows is a description of some of the implications the sectors have on the work of the FET Colleges.

## *Business – the private sector*

Consideration of the private sector requires an appreciation of its defining characteristics as described and elaborated on in the above section. It also requires appreciation of the social history of business relative to the context in which the partnership is taking place.

The business sector is the driver of wealth creation, which is based on the core economic pursuit of creating new supply chains and adding value to existing ones. As a consequence of the processes associated with business development, economic activity is a dominant driver in human settlement patterns. Human settlement patterns create the basic fabric of social and cultural life. Moreover, business processes, from extraction through

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[7] The policy in South Africa where the three tiers of government, namely national, provincial and local, are intended to work co-operatively at appropriate levels of coordination

manufacturing, transporting and waste creation, impact severely on the environment. Nevertheless, business is excellent at innovation, the creation of products and services and the flow of capital into the community through employment. However, contemporary pressures on business require a green and humane face, with pressure emanating from civil society in this regard.

The generic competencies of the private sector are covered in the literature. However, the specific competency of business as it relates to FET is its ability to promote and grow businesses which expand the economy, thus enhancing the opportunities for employees and new business initiatives to integrate into their supply chains.

## *Government – the public sector*

The government sector provides the vehicle for orderly and progressive society.  At one end, government is embedded in policy formation through its political heads and parliament and, at the other end, government is integrated into the lives of the citizenry through service delivery. It is government that takes responsibility for the creation of laws and policies and the processes of their implementation. Moreover, government allocates the means provided through taxation for public services and facilities.

New government thinking includes the idea of government as enabler and facilitator rather than the key provider, although this remains contentious in the South African situation. Examples of this include the partial privatisation of services such as telecommunications (Telkom) and electricity (Eskom) and the application of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) for infrastructure development.

In South Africa, the government has taken a deliberate policy decision to go the route of developmental government. This means that greater attention is given by government to the downside of market forces at work in a society with deeply embedded and inherent inequity. Thus, government looks at ways to compensate for structural inequities and resultant market failure through direct intervention and through producing enabling legislation, which attempts to create conditions for progressive transformation. For example, BEE is intended to address the racial inequities in organisations by directly influencing organisational policy through target setting. This has also influenced FET policy

through pushing for the market to take training seriously and to aggressively promote job creation and up-skilling. Businesses pay the Skills Levy tax, thus financing the SETAs, who, in turn, are intended to influence organisations. The Department of Trade and Industry provide information and financing mechanisms for the development of new industrial movements intended to be of comparative advantage to South Africans, thus promoting competitive opportunities.

In relation to FET, government clearly recognises and responds to a need to shape and promote training. This it does through policy and the allocation of its resources. We speak of an enabling environment – an approach whereby government seeks to inform policy that will assist rather than hinder initiatives. The primary agency is through (i) Integrated Development Planning at local level; and (ii) national and regional infrastructure projects and clarifying the HR requirements for implementation. These projects are in turn supported by investment incentivising and the creation of an attractive business climate for local and foreign investment, education policy (particularly in relation to the FET Colleges) and transformation and equity.

Besides the creation of enabling policy, it is incumbent on the government to direct training needs through its responsibilities for service delivery, infrastructure development and the promotion of Local Economic Development. It is the view of Bodhanya and Hardman (2008), in reference to Local Economic Development, that the government's creation of enabling conditions by *"removing barriers to entry and providing incentives for innovation"* (p 1*)* is essential in order to create a more inclusive economy. They support the view that the state creates the institutional framework that supports the evolutionary growth of markets through creating enabling conditions. FET provision is one of these enablers.

Government in South Africa has created a three tiered state apparatus, namely national, provincial and local government. These are referred to as spheres to emphasise the need for integration. The integration of the three is referred to as co-operative government, with the dominant vehicle for development being the Local Development Plan, created at Local Government level, at the level of district. Moreover, government is conceptualised as developmental, implying an influential role in development through enabling policy creation and the financial incentivising of social and economic projects (Turok, 2010).

### Civil society – the issues sector

Civil society refers to the primary institutions that society creates, namely the family and community, and includes organisations that reflect strong societal interest and primary concerns that fall outside the contemporary and direct interest of the private and public sectors. Organisationally, it is populated by faith-based organisations, community organisations and non-governmental organisations, mostly in the form of special interest groups. The union movement is a powerful branch of civil society.

With respect to FET, the primary group, the family, requires an income to survive and to raise its inter-generational aspirations. Here, one has to account for the torn fabric of society consequential to the impact of HIV/Aids in KwaZulu-Natal. When one considers the host of community and non-governmental organisations that exist, as well as the range of social problems being experienced in South Africa, themes that recur over and again are unemployment and poverty. In relation to partnerships, various organisations have emerged which are committed to the promotion of various forms of cross sector partnerships. The main purposes of such organisations are advocacy and brokering.

In the contemporary situation, NGOs are situated in the civil society and some very significant stakeholders reside in this institutional form. The identity of NGOs has been deconstructed, with some authors considering them to be co-opted or coerced and thus neutralised through their relationship with business. This view is well argued by Bond (2006) who draws on his understanding of the World Social Forum (WSF) when he writes,

> *"...what is surely the main accomplishment of the WSF is the construction of dialogical spaces. These spaces might ultimately support ideological, analytical, strategic, and even tactical convergence between far-flung movements which span the globe. Indeed the Social Forum network is potentially a means by which the 'globalization of people' can become real, a genuine counterpoint to the "globalization of capital" (Bond, 2006 p 370).*

### Sectors, organisations and networks

While it is convenient to think of sectors in a generic way, each sector is made up of a whole variety of different organisations, differing in purpose, special architecture and size, but all

having some manifestation of the distinctive competencies associated with the sector. However, different and dynamic formations of connectivity are evident. Thus, it is difficult for a sector to express itself with a single voice, but has to be seen as a collection of simultaneous conversations. The useful competency, therefore, is to understand the various attractors and the dynamics in which they are embedded.

Each region, district or locality will have its own manifestations of the sectors. From a business perspective this could be a dominant business with its supply chain operations (Toyota or Mondi in the South Durban basin), a cluster development, a retail hub (Pavilion, Midlands Mall), an agricultural co-operative, a tourist route (Midlands Meander), a franchise operation, a chain store and so on. Moreover, individual businesses are involved in multiple networks (a franchise in a mall, drawing from a wholesaler, belonging to a chamber, supplying a service to a corporate customer)

Various community and NGO networks exist within civil society, as do different services and different localities exist as organisational nodal points in government. In these various combinations, it is useful to be able to describe the magnetic forces which draw organisations together, understand the integrative mechanisms that facilitate their interconnectivity, and identify the value-add created through this interaction.

Non- governmental organisations have been applied in education in schooling, especially as a device to contextualise education in the community and to build support for schooling within the community. There is a long international history of the practice of a dual curriculum, most notably in models of learning built on an apprenticeship model. The distinction follows a theory/practice divide. This emphasises the difference between theoretical academic knowledge and experiential learning in the workplace. The main differences are the balance between theory and practice, the modality of the design and application, and how it fits the career life-cycle of the learner. This model has implications for knowledge-management and the transfer of knowledge and expertise. There is an emphasis on knowledge in use and craft knowledge. Increasingly this model needs to take into account change and innovation amidst the complexity of the globalisation of work and electronic intelligence.

There seems to be a broad based realisation that the interrelationships between business and education are essential, and that they need conscious effort to establish, maintain and improve in the interests of competitive global economic performance. It is argued that such relationships are mutually beneficial, but require government to provide a driving force and institutions at the local level to be creative in their strategic uptake. This needs to be underpinned by the necessary human and financial resources, as well as by the active commitment of the relevant organisations. Misko et al., (2005), writing for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), describe the situations in China and Australia with reference to the above. They speak of a tight connection in Australia through the well-established apprenticeship system, as well as the need for innovation in work and technology to keep pace with international requirements in an era of rapid change in information technology and telecommunications. It is acknowledged that the traditional pathways from school to work are becoming increasingly difficult. The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) was established in 1992 to facilitate and fast-track change. This body was abolished and replaced by the Department of Employment, Science and Training in 2005.

China has had a very different social history to Australia, but since the 1980s, there has been a movement towards education/industrial linkages. In 1996, the Vocational Education Law was established.

The NCVER research highlights differences between the countries in terms of educational value systems, educational philosophies, philosophies of industry involvement and models of collaboration. This conceptual framework is a useful one to identify the broad key elements in Education/Business/Industry collaboration. The study also highlights the importance of adequate resources to bring policy to fruition. However, the causal linkages between education and employment are unclear and difficult, although it is clear that information and knowledge management is improved through more dynamic inter-relationships.

In terms of the nature and variety of partnerships and the people skills associated with them, a separate comprehensive study was undertaken in Australia by (Callan, 2004). Organisations were set up for managing partnerships for training and were provided with

government support. They were intended to build staff linkages with industry and thus improve staff capabilities and stimulate the economy. From the business perspective, it allowed for more focus on core business with the knowledge that skills training was in place. Partnership types focussed on pooling of resources, extending staff training capability though a greater pool of expertise in joint ventures and the innovative improvement of training approaches. Hindrances to partnerships were seen to include meeting the procedural mechanisms within organisations. Benefits included higher customisation and flexibility, new mechanisms for consultation and communication, and a greater repertoire of teaching and learning strategies. Findings revealed that mutual trust built on personal relationships is key to maintaining and extending partnerships and there was a preference for longer term partnership programmes (a three year cycle was indicated as preferable). Partnerships have to be financially sustainable, but not necessarily profitable, with value for money being a gain. High levels of quality co-operation and mutually supportive relationship building and maintenance with a number of people were indicated as beneficial. Mutual business interests emerge through extending on mutual networks.

The study identified the relationship between successful partnerships and organisations adept at learning, change and innovation management. More unsuccessful than successful partnerships were identified and the conclusion drawn is that few organisations manage partnerships very well. Unsuccessful partnerships are attributed to unexpected environmental factors and events, inappropriate business models or poor relationships.

In Australia, the Vocational Education and Training environment is considered highly competitive and borderless with a significant electronic component. The industrial environment is even more competitive and requires enhanced processes to assist in staff training, retention and replacement. Callan draws on the work of Kanter (1994), who describes the most important assets of companies in the 21$^{st}$ century as concepts, competence and connections. Concepts relate to innovation, competence to learning and connections to harvesting networks which includes partnerships.

While the use of partnerships is widespread, I am particularly interested in social partnerships operating in the paradigm of "new partnerships", which I define as deliberate partnerships involving constellations of agents drawn from the three core institutional

forms of business, government and civil society. The intention of such partnerships is to address deep social concerns. While under normal circumstances, in so called developed countries, partnerships between FET institutions and employers are a normal part of doing business, in South Africa there is an additional dimension. This is a consequence of the notion of developmental government, which is a cross-cutting policy issue. The broad rationale is to influence policy to promote the reconstruction of South African life to reflect a post-apartheid society where the structural injustices of the past are rectified in as short a time as possible in order to normalize society. Thus, it is intended that policies that influence the labour force will be built into the work of the FET Colleges. It needs to be remembered that the FET sector itself has been the subject of significant focus and expectation as an instrument for social change. Thus, the partnerships, which are the focus of this research, are on FET learning and are expected to sweep in and include a broader perspective to contribute to social transformation through taking into account the perspectives of government policy, the public good and community development. This requires linkages with a broad range of institutions and the construction of a variety of partnership formations. Within this framework, the FET Colleges have to maintain a focus on their core business, namely effective learning programmes in line with vocational learning. The term vocational learning is deliberately intended to convey the importance for learning that contributes to success in the workplace, including new business development. In the context of the FET Colleges, this space is about the growth of human capacity for the purpose of workforce development and extension as the hub of socio-economic development.

## Partnerships as exhibiting systemic and complexity characteristics

The third premise underpinning my living theory of new partnering in relation to the FET Colleges draws from the systems and complexity literature, which provides a rich source of theory based practice which has direct relevance to facing the challenges of building inter-organisational linkages to deal with deep social issues. In the research chapter, I will argue that systems-thinking provides a very useful framework for research and knowledge creation in partnerships. Understanding and working with the interconnectedness of perspectives is a fundamental principle in systems thinking research and practice. This means it provides an appreciation that in partnerships the whole is greater than the sum of

the parts. From a different perspective, it means that one can view a context with its complexity and appreciate that there are a number of embedded perspectives.

Systems Thinking, as described by Jackson, (2000), emphasises the interconnected nature of the world. Foundation concepts in systems thinking include elements, systems and environments, systems, sub-systems and supra-systems, influence, dynamics and non-linear causality, feedback and delay, and boundaries and boundary judgements (Cabrera, Colosi, & Lobdell, 2008). This language is used to assist in the framing of partnership ideas, which are used to inform the application of social partnership thinking and practice

The construct of domain (Bertels & Vredenberg, 2004) assists to critique the restrictions of narrowly defined boundary drawing. Different perspectives can be accommodated within the concept of a domain. The implication is that the boundaries are more inclusive within a domain and move beyond the more narrowly defined interests of particular organisations. Thus, for me, the concept of domain is an important one because it implies the redrawing of boundaries around problematic situations to include stakeholder perspectives and resources.

Moreover, because the concept of domain is also used in knowledge construction to denote a field of knowledge, it lends itself to the clarification of macro issues for a whole group of organisations with a collective interest. Thus, I argue that one has to develop an appreciation of the domain of FET responsivity, rather than approaching it through the narrow perspectives of the various stakeholders. The business world wants trained, employable staff, with articular competency sets; the FET College wants student numbers; the community wants people employed and self-sufficient, rather than unemployed, frustrated and troublesome; and the government wants to deliver on its mandate of a decent job for all.  By thinking of all of the above as components within a domain characterised by transition and transformation, the stakeholders can find space to connect and appreciate the deeper systemic challenges and the need for new partnerships for human development.

By way of illustration, a further example of cross sector collaborations (new partnerships) is provided. It relates to the affordable housing market in Australia where Susilwati, Skitmore and Armitage (2005 p5) indicate that it requires

*"working across boundaries and outside their comfort zones." , "where they share the investment of resources, work, risk, responsibility, decision-making, authority, benefits and burdens" so that "a more complex task can be done more efficiently with existing resources."*

The use of cross sector partnerships for complex social problems is acknowledged and propositions concerning their effectiveness are suggested (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). They suggest starting with a theoretical framework which sets out the initial conditions, including the environment. The perceived failures will be represented in this framework. This is to be followed by forging an initial agreement that is designed to bring about improvement, followed by the building of leadership with legitimacy and trust. Thus conflicts will be managed. Structure and governance will be designed and implemented to address contingencies and constraints. This will include figuring out types of collaboration and how to deal with power imbalances and competing institutional logics.

## Partnership and the formation of social capital

My fourth premise in relation to responsivity through partnerships is that an understanding of the dynamics influencing social capital and the implications for inter-personal and inter-institutional dynamics is essential. This has been alluded to in the above sections. Such social capital is reflected in the acceptance of legitimacy and the building of trust.

Probably the biggest barrier to partnership formulation and development is the lack of trust between those attempting to partner. This is well reflected in the literature (Kimber & Raghunath, 2001; Zhang & Huxham, 2009 p 189). These authors point out that managerial dissatisfaction with partnerships is high and is reflected through power relationships, goal congruency, leadership style and the supportiveness reflected in relationships. They indicate that while trust as a concept is under-conceptualised, it has a psychological dimension relating to inter-personal expectations and sociological roots in the orientation within cultures towards others. Thus, while partnerships grow out of organisations, they are enacted through individuals with particular understanding of 'us', 'me' and 'them'. Trust also includes performativity expectations. Trusting, therefore, requires balancing confidence and risk.

In new partnerships, trust is associated with inter-sector relationships, where the above factors concerning risk often develop into stereotypic positions. This means that agents will revert to the discourse associated with their sector, leading to confrontation. New partnerships work on the assumption that through working together these stereotypic identities will be transformed to embrace the different perspectives and see beyond narrow perspectives. This is a key concept in partners developing trusting relationships.  I, following Zhang (2009), take the position that identity construction is dominantly a continuing process rather that a static outcome, constructed through discourse and thus capable of transformation. Zang introduces the concepts of identity characters (explanation of who I am and who you are), deference action (courteous recognition of others) and identity fit (accommodating my identity characters to yours), all concepts I find useful to explain the interaction process observed between representatives in partnerships. Trust building implies the process of dialogue based on the purposeful exploration of these constructs. Such inter-relational trust building requires nurturing as a continuous process (Vangen & Huxham, 2003 p 6). These writers describe this process as incremental, as reputation grows through experience, thus leading to more enduring trust.

Where partnerships are failing, the above mentioned authors indicate that language such as referral to power games, plays and struggles become reflected in the identity of characters (Vangen & Huxham, 2003 p 13). They emphasise two structural factors of partnership contexts, namely ambiguity and complexity, and thus the need for managing expectations, agreeing on the aims of the collaboration, and managing the identified risks, dynamics and power imbalances, which is difficult. Thus their conclusion is not surprising that;

> *"Practitioners perceptions suggest that unequal power relations and the need to protect individual organisations' interests by manipulating and controlling collaborative agendas are inevitable difficulties pertaining to the collaborative processes and that these issues in particular tend to hamper trust building" (p 26).*

 Beaulieu and Pasquero (2002) emphasise the need to understand and work with stakeholder dynamics, starting with the need to work with building the legitimacy of the partnership and understanding the processes which support this legitimisation process. They define the professional legitimacy required for partnership work as,

> *"Professional legitimacy is a multidimensional construct whose existence is linked to a profession's socio economic relevance. Relevance is related to the expectations regarding the corpus of knowledge required of members, individual competencies, and market and social considerations. Six dimensions were identified as constituents of the concept of legitimacy: legal, identity, moral, technical, institutional and perceptual" (p 54).*

Kimber and Raghunath (2001 p 64) remind us of the importance of trust in partnership building and the need to be aware of economic opportunism on the part of business,

> *"When potential partners get together, they experience each other through the smokescreen of preliminary knowledge, untested assumptions and prior experience, both relevant and irrelevant to alliance management."*

Levieki et al., (2002) developed a trust matrix which differentiates between different forms of relationships. They also conceptualize trust styles in relation to individuals, groups, small communities and large communities. Their research focuses on organisations involved in joint venturing in India and Australia.

Probably one of the most significant issues in governance is the level of trust that exists between partners and the way in which trust grows. The question between the process of trust and the level of formality raises the question of whether a partnership that is formalised will of necessity have a higher trust quotient (Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007). Expanding on my own thinking about new partnerships, I think that while formal agreements are necessary for particular projects, the real binding and development come about through people growing together and sharing the difficulties and successes of their common social commitment.

Windsor (2002) focuses on the question of stakeholder responsibilities and the importance of lead agents in establishing the frameworks of engagement. This issue is particularly important in the brokering of partnerships, as illustrated in the work of Tennyson and Wilde (2000), where they differentiate between the source of the brokering initiative and the implications for relationship building. Payne and Calton (2002) emphasise the need for and modes of dialogue required between stakeholders. They identify concerns relating to the watering down of scientific knowledge when communicated in open contexts, the biases

brought about by controlling interests, techniques used by developed nations that do not translate into fair dialogue when used in other cultural contexts, the danger of burnout from on-going dialogues and the need to develop better connections between problem contexts and processes.

Because partnerships often result in groups of people needing to work together, group dynamics are important. Bion, (quoted in April et. al., 2000, p 20) speaks about work groups as reflecting;

> *"a level of functioning at which members consciously pursue an agreed upon objective and deliberately work towards the completion of a task."*

Work groups contain the hidden agendas, unconscious wishes, fears, defences, fantasies, impulses and projections of individuals. These include dependency (security and protection from one individual), fight or flight, fight for leadership or withdrawal, and pairing – where two members take it on themselves to make the group work.

## Partnerships for innovation

My fifth premise is that partnerships provide a space for creative thinking about many of the deeply embedded problems facing society. Many problems which we face today can be considered as "wicked" (Clarke & Stewart, 2000). This means that they are difficult to conceptualise and are often complex, coming across as multi-faceted. Thus, the point of entry into solving problems becomes difficult. As such they defy discipline bounded approaches and require innovation within interdisciplinary frameworks. Partnership approaches can inspire innovative and creative spaces. Thus it is appropriate to think of them as learning spaces where our knowledge of learning organisations is useful. Partnerships can be considered to occupy virtual institutional space or inter-institutional space and can facilitate the construction of new constructs through learning and participation. However, it has been my experience that partnership practitioners, in general, have difficulty in imagining this space and rather tend to think of partnerships as projects.

If one draws on the learning organisation theory, this partnership space can be considered to be a place for the introduction of new ideas and sense-making, a space where generative learning is possible. Generative learning is explorative rather than exploitative, although

partnerships create a potential inter-space between exploration and exploitation. Exploitative learning can lead to new adaptations in the individual participating organisations as a consequence of learning through the partnership.

Innovation is an extremely large field dealing with incremental, radical and transformative change in products, services and processes (Tidd, Bressant, & Pavitt, 2001 p 8) and is geared towards creating competitive advantage. Competitive advantage, while a useful concept in the business sector, needs clarification in its translation into the public sector. Here the notion of enhanced service delivery is more useful as is the notion of increasing economic participation, especially for those previously excluded from markets for a variety of reasons. These exclusions are historically a consequence of location, lack of infrastructure and access, poor education, the lack of an entrepreneurial culture, gender and race. While policy is enacted to combat these factors, they take time and resources.

What is emerging, however, is an epistemology of engagement. This epistemology acknowledges that the different discourses defining different sectors and organisations representative of them, causes inter-conversational difficulties. This requires  a conscious effort to developing a conversational context for interaction (Gibbons, 2005).

Gibbons (2005) provides an emergent language to describe this space. While his ideas are drawn from partnerships between universities and the private sector, the language is portable to other partnership contexts. He uses the concept of *linkages* to describe controlled engagements between institutions and suggest that they occur within an agreed upon understanding of *social contract*. He uses the concept of *transgressivity* when relationships are dominated in one direction from one organisation and in this way, social contract is perceived to be undermined. *Transgressivity* implies an organisational arrogance in interfering within the space of another organisation. However, as a result of greater freedom in information and openness to change, boundaries between organisations have greater potential for *permeability.* This implies an exploratory orientation towards mutual understanding.  He uses the concept of contextualisation to infer the greater degree of understanding possible when one considers an issue within the broader boundary framework of an *exploratory orientation.* He refers to knowledge created in this context as *socially robust.* This greater permeability naturally leads to network type arrangements,

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which are organisationally loose, but individually strong. Where permeability is possible, a greater degree of **participative and disaggregated** decision making is possible.

Gibbons then goes on to develop the language of the **transaction.** He speaks of **degrees of contextualisation, boundary objects** and **transaction spaces and trading zones**. He implies that by **degrees of contextualisation** there are different strengths to the flows of participation, with strong being highly fluid and reciprocal (autonomous), and weak being more forced and stage managed.

By **boundary objects** he refers to the fact that the cultures of different sectors and organisations are such that they inhabit different socially constructed worlds. A boundary object will be a generally neutral concept, artefact or event inhabiting intersecting social worlds where a common interest is highly possible as an initiation into a more constructive conversation around issues of substance. In the case of social partnerships, I prefer to speak of boundary subjects to describe the relative sector identities of particular people - the mother, the citizen, the worker - one subject, different identity perspectives.

**Trading zones** imply that when people trade, they trade that which is dissimilar and determine relative value weightings and meanings. It is in determining this equivalence of value that gives trading its meaning. In the same way, partnerships are driven by the concept of the relative value gained by the partners and how they learn to appreciate their complementarity as adding value. A trading zone will develop a language of its own, the language of that particular market place. In the same way, partnerships will develop their own language. They are about dialogue at boundaries and not merely transactions across boundaries. However, according to (Ansett, 2005 p 36),

> *"The evolution of such multi-stakeholder initiatives has improved levels of understanding between the sectors and opened up new collaborative spaces designed to tackle supply chain labour issues. Such collaborative spaces, although far from perfect, often deliver solutions that are more sustainable and better for workers and managers than band-aid fixes that have become the norm"*

It is at the level of partnership epistemology that the complexity associated with the practice of partnerships becomes evident. This is a consequence of the variety of interpretations that can be placed on partnerships.

The innovation I propose, which grows out of the new partnership literature, is that of societal value creation, which is referred to by a number of new partnership scholars (Le Ber, 2008; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010; Perlas, 2000; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Scharmer, 2009; Waddell, 2005). I suggest that societal value creation is a concept well worth taking note of in South Africa as a country immersed in the process of re-creation. It is intended to indicate that partnerships have the potential to address deep problems in society by means of new partnerships and connective leadership. For example, (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and others are now suggesting that good corporate citizenship is not an add-on, but that it is becoming integral to business. "Doing good" refers primarily to the goals espoused in good corporate governance and corporate citizenship and relates primarily to sustainability in economic, social and earth terms. (Scharmer, 2009) emphasises how essential it is to view the world holistically because of relational interconnectedness. Le Ber et al., (2010) emphasize the role of civil society and the importance of developing powerful voice.

## Partnership intelligences

My sixth premise in my living theory construct is that the individual partnership practitioners, at whatever level they are working, need to focus on developing their own partnership competencies, although some of them will have more innate partnership intelligence than others.

The FET Colleges' role in the above is to ensure that their staff members are competent to advocate, broker, manage and provide the required training through a new partnership mind-set. They should develop strategies that draw on the government's enabling policies, driven from the developmental government perspective, and supply trainees into a market driven economy.

If the FET Colleges are to go the responsive partnership route, it is my contention that they need to do it from an informed position. Thus, in the programme presented to the FET

managers, one of the modules focussed on partnerships. It was intended to meet certain goals of direct relevance to them, namely,

To understand and contextualize within the FET Sector:

- The worldviews and governance mind-sets driving for a partnership approach
- The world from an institutional perspective, thus appreciating the never-ending dynamic relation between the institutional sectors of society, namely the public, private and civil sectors
- Each sector, particularly in the contemporary situation, in relation to its values, drivers, mechanisms, strengths, weaknesses, and competencies
- The dangers and pitfalls of partnerships as well as their benefits and advantages
- The ethical issues embedded in partnerships
- The mechanisms of partnership engagement
- The evaluation of partnerships

The module was also designed to teach the participants to:

- Advocate for worthwhile partnerships
- Formulate appropriate partnerships
- Deal with the internal mechanisms within their own organisations to manage partnerships
- Inter-relate with stakeholders in order to constructively engage and design partnerships
- Project manage partnerships
- Deal with the emergent properties of partnerships including the conflicts and dilemmas
- Evaluate partnerships

The implication of such a course for the FET student group provided me with the usual stimulating challenge of curriculum design. I started where I always start, which is to draw on the literature and develop a compilation of what I consider to be appropriate readings.

In considering partnership teaching, I suggest partnership intelligences. I draw on the idea of Gardner (Gardner, 1991; Hardman, 2011) re multiple intelligences and suggest that for the individual to respond to partnership opportunities, certain competencies have to be built and that these competencies are easier to grasp for people who have an innate inclination towards the intelligences described below.

*Connective intelligence* is about partnership cognition and the ability to conceptualise partnerships and appreciate their systemic dynamics. This includes the ability to recognise the elements of partnership based innovation for deep social change. It is this connective intelligence which informs a perceived value constellation. A value constellation is the constructive process of identifying a plausible partnership opportunity. The competencies associated with it would be to visualise the value added nature of creating particular partnership configurations, an appreciation of the distinctive resources and competencies distinctive to different organisations and institutions and the determination of appropriate boundaries and understanding of boundary issues, boundary critique and stakeholder implications (Abrahamson, 2000; Alexander, 2005; Beaulieu & Pasquero, 2002; Gibbons, 2005; Midgley et al., 2007)

*Relational intelligence* is about building the social capital essential for partnerships to succeed. This includes building trust and a shared communication platform. This includes an appreciation of the perspectives of individuals within the context of their constituencies, their attitudes and goals, and their personal and unique learning and communicative styles. The focus will be on building trust, especially in contexts of relational proximity (Kimber & Raghunath, 2001; Murphy, 2006)

*Governance intelligence* is about the recognition of power and boundary considerations that surface and have to be managed in partnership contexts. This includes the development and implementation of public policy and the associated political and ideological considerations, the phases of an individual partnership project within a possible repertoire of partnership projects, the various framing and boundary conditions that exist within the inter-organisational competencies of a partnership and leadership capacity to transcend institutional and organisational restraints (Bertels & Vredenberg, 2004).

*Ethical intelligence* is about understanding the impact and consequences of decisions made in the name of the partnership on people, institutions and the planet. The issues of human rights and sustainability are paramount. This requires having the insight to make judgements; understanding worldviews; appreciating diversity in that social, political and cultural perspectives influence actions; developing shared knowledge about the full costs and benefits of any initiative at the broadest level; and appreciating likely consequences and developing awareness for unintended consequences.

## Partnership leadership

My seventh premise is that being responsive for the sake of building new partnerships as a core institutional competency requires the development of partnership leadership. I have referred to this as connective leadership. I acknowledge that this term is used in the literature and is generally associated with Lipman-Blumen, (1996) and her use of connective in the sense of gender and leadership. The use I make of it is nuanced by the concept of collaborative leadership as referred to by Huxham and Vagen (2005). The leadership I am attempting to address grows out of the expression of the partnership brokering competencies I have developed in the previous section. This leadership is characterised by open and transparent dialogue between the social partners and the building of mechanisms for constructive engagement. Thus, new partnerships require a new kind of leadership which focuses on bridge building, collaboration, consensus seeking and appreciation of social complexity (Innes & Booher, 1999; Ortner, 2007; Snowden & Stanbridge, 2004). This leadership must manifest the partnership intelligences that have been described in the previous section. It is leadership which is simultaneously able to accommodate a diverse range of interests. Although the dominant interest might be the particular organisation that the leader represents, the interests of the social partners have to be considered as equally important. Thus leaders have to consider both the specific and the holistic implications of leadership action. To go further, partnerships not only require leaders with this breadth of appreciation, they also require leaders to work connectively with other leaders representing different organisations and interests and find ways of accommodating the different power constraints. The leadership dimensions of my living theory are about being aware of values and having a baseline of tested values which they espouse, live by, and influence others to consider. In my view, incongruous leadership is a process wherein one is unaware and

unreflective of one's values and/or where one is prepared to subjugate one's own espoused values through self-interest or coercion, thus reflecting tacit, more fundamental values such as self-preservation or unbridled accumulation. The opposite view is one where, despite situations of difficulty, pressure and temptations, one's values become more honed; namely more contextual, refined, resolute, clarified and better expressed. Partnerships require appropriate quality leadership  (Ansari, Oskrochi, & Phillips, 2001) which needs to take into account the purposes of the new partnership. However, this needs to be done in a way which takes into account the emergent self-organising dynamics that come about when deliberate change is presumed and engaged (Plowman et al., 2007 p 342). This implies that being complex adaptive becomes manifest through agents who are adaptable in the way they act and interact and are very sensitive to the context and the prevailing conditions at the time of their engagement;  they adjust to the environment as it unfolds, they vacillate in the process of deciding and make decisions when uncertainty becomes unbearable.

My living theory in relation to leadership also appreciates that there is a broad diversity of expressions of value and therefore no one expression must be considered in isolation, but must be brought into the conversation in the pursuit of fundamental human values recognising our co-existence in and co-accountability for the world we inhabit. Again, there is no assumption that this is easy or achievable, but this in no way delegitimises the pursuit. However, my pursuit is not a lonely one. The profound shift in thinking about governance being informed by the so called triple bottom line takes into account not only fiduciary responsibility, but also economic, social and environmental responsibility (Leeson & Ivers, 2006; Newton-King & le Roux, 2004; Zadek, 2005). This indicates a global movement towards redefining the value proposition underpinning sustainable societal well-being. Thus, the value position I postulate as being "viability" is being redefined in terms of "sustainability". In my African situation, I see an obvious link between these concepts and "Ubuntu" or "African Humanism[8]". I also see the inevitability of an appreciation of non-dualism in the realisation that society, the environment and the economy are indivisible.

With reference to the institutions of state, my living theory is that the pursuit of such institutions should be to aspire towards conversing about, conceiving and incrementally

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[8] An African philosophy which recognises that the identity of the individual is closely linked to the community and that the well-being of one is the responsibility of all.

achieving the ideal society, which is viable (continuously adapting) in its sustainability, while remembering at the same time that this is a journey likened to finding the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Emergence happens and viability implies change. Ideally human endeavour should be focused on looking for systemic approaches through which we can gain lost ground. I wrote,

> *"The emergence of thinking about sustainability is a result of increasing awareness about the impact of business and industry in the contemporary world and our sense of responsibility about this impact. It is premised on the realisation that we are often unaware of the consequences of human action, especially the unintended consequences of our actions as they unfold systemically over time. At the heart of our concern is an awareness that we need not only to learn to understand the unfolding implications of current actions, but we also need to address the heritage of unsustainable development we have inherited. This presents us with the double challenge of sustainability – redress for the debilitating consequences of past practices – and fundamentally rethinking future practices to ensure their sustainability. We have to learn to do things differently and that implies thinking differently about things!"* (Hardman, 2004 p 236)

At a practical level in the context of this thesis, this means increasingly achieving a society with sufficient dignified work and social justice. The fact that this is ultimately unachievable and that we can never deal with the range of diversity and expressions of complexity, again, does not negate the pursuit.  My living theory, however, acknowledges that the nature of human society is such that, in line with the natural order of complexity, on-going dynamical occurrences will become manifest, thus confounding simplistic interventions and challenging contemporary discourses and inevitably encouraging change, thus enabling new dialogues. Emergent new discourses provide the energy to re-motivate the pursuit and move the process onwards. In considering organisational aspirations and dynamics one has also got to consider the difference between (i) *ideological blockages,* where there might be fundamental disagreements on aims and structure of the ideal; (ii) *resource limitations,* which speaks of the core economic issues of finite resources and infinite wants; and *(iii) developmental awareness, learning, or mindfulness, w*hich refers to knowledge and learning issues*.* These have political power implications, especially in social planning and resource

allocation. Thus, the deconstruction of constructs of leadership and power and the embedded values in play are a key theme for leadership education. This underscores my belief in the democratization of knowledge in the pursuit of emancipatory human development.

A partnership worldview is appreciative of the potential for incremental good that can develop through the appropriate and productive leveraging of inter-relationships for co-operation in social planning and development between institutions and organisations (Svensson & Nilsson, 2008). Inter-agency collaboration is seen as an approach to the improvement of community well-being and human situations (Cross et al., 2009). This is contrasted with a view where relationships are constructed as dominantly adversarial and therefore viewed with suspicion and mistrust. This view, however, has its critics with Yolles and Iles (2006) being among the most assertive. They link their criticism to Public Private Partnerships and to infrastructure, in particular, when they assert that,

> "However potentially useful the partnering process of centripetal politics might be, there are fundamental problems with the formation of PPP alliances as governments seek private corporations to help them service their infrastructural needs. These problems arise from their corporate and private ethical and ideological incommensurability"(2006 p 627).

It is my contention that the growing interest and research in cross-sector partnerships and corporate citizenship, while problematic, as indicated above, has potential application in Further Education and Training in South Africa. I compare this to the whole raft of innovation in numerous spheres which has flowed from space travel research. (This is a contemporary focus of the IPN, which I have mentioned, now rebranded as the International education business Partnership Network; IebPN). These advances include innovative applications in materials, communication, fuel etc. In the same way, I am postulating that the considerable research and development and consequent learning that has emerged from cross-sector partnerships, which has been mainly driven from the private sector in the form of enlightened self-interest, can be transferred to the further education sector, which is reliant on productive inter-relationships for the purposes of quality programme and curriculum development, and for the identification of potential job opportunities and student placements. The learning from the field of corporate citizenship

in relation to the partnership mind-set might be very significant to changing attitudes and building linkages essential for significant strides in FET.

In relation to leadership in the FET Colleges, I draw on four key issues, namely, leading as an entrustment, leading as communicating, leading as selecting and leading as integrating. I envisage these as fundamental leadership enablers or capabilities (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Plowman et al., 2007 p 341; Webb, Lettice, & Lemon, 2006), meaning that the development of these competencies facilitates leadership in the dynamic complexity across and between the sectors where we need to facilitate a coherence to the leadership narrative with multi-story accommodation (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007; Knowles, 2002).

Entrustment captures the responsibility of holding and respecting the identity, dreams and aspirations of people and developing a collective consciousness, conscience, values and sense of community. It implies the relationship between leaders and followers and the nature of the social capital in which this relationship is embedded. It is a relationship referred to as "*a process of influence to achieve mutual goals*" (Van Vugt, 2006 p 335). The emphasis is on transactions and the degree of flexibility afforded by the inter-relationships and the interconnectedness between the agents (Wood, 2005). Within partnerships, this implies appreciating the different perspectives of the different actors and the constituencies they represent. The challenge is to facilitate aligned, but discrete, appreciation of the partnership focus and appreciation of the distinct implications for the different actors and their institutions. A useful concept which captures this is the "bridging" concept, which indicates that social capital has to be created as a foundation for the partnering. This is indicated in shared value creation and the facilitation of coherence while appreciating that the partnering process can be turbulent and challenging in the anticipation of emergence.

**Entrustment** implies a relationship between those who are leading and those who are following, underpinned by the social contract in place. It is the leadership application of social capital. My living theory is that leaders should earn trust and that the relationship between leaders and followers should be built on the philosophy of servant leadership.

**Communication** refers to envisioning the culture of the institution or organisation and developing intuition, expression, language and narrative. The implications of this are captured in reference to the work of Gibbons (2005), which indicates the need for

constructing a new conceptualisation of social contract and the communication challenges implicated. For Scharmer (2009 p 5), this is about making inspired connections. Communication is not only explicit, but is also tacit, often reflecting values which are not espoused or articulated, and not necessarily even in the consciousness of the one holding them. My living theory is that communication should be open and transparent and should express emotional maturity.

**Selection** includes facilitating leadership continuity through mentoring, coaching and socialising the appropriate values into the architecture of the leadership task. This results in building good relationships. Here the emphasis is on identifying the various champions located in the various partnering organisations and building a sense of community between them. My living theory, as it relates to new partnerships, is that those agents selected to work in the partnership must ensure that others within their organisation are sufficiently familiar with what is going on in the partnership, so that they can step in and contribute when necessary.

**Integration** involves designing, navigating, connecting, compelling, blending, compounding and catalysing energy within the leadership space. For partnering, this includes the designing and implementing of the partnering initiative, drawing on the framing methodologies identified. This is the most distinctive characteristic of new partnership leadership and is expressed in this thesis as connective leadership.

> *'If our job as leaders is to allow for renewal and growth, for the recycling of nutrients in our workplaces, for creativity and new approaches to old problems, then we had better brace ourselves for chaos, uncertainty and turbulence.'* (April et al., 2000 p 5)

These words emphasise the challenge. The following argument presented by Tennyson indicates one response. She makes the point that early innovators are providing the pathway for partnerships as a new development paradigm and that the growing thinking about brokering provides a perspective on partnership leadership. Partnership leaders can be animators, pioneers, coordinators or innovators, who act in a transformative way. Thus she has initiated a partnership broking learning programme and brokering accreditation process (R Tennyson, 2005; R. Tennyson & Wilde, 2000).

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Partnership leadership might need to be pre-emptive in reading an environment as was the case of the leadership group referred to as the Consultative Business Movement, with its underpinning culture of servant-hood (Lynham et al., 2005). It needs to be generative and catalytic to exemplify the purpose of partnering and build positive relationships (Ansari et al., 2001).

## Partnership evaluation

Here, my premise, the eighth, is that partnerships need to be evaluated as there is no guarantee that they will work in all situations. Just as with any project, evaluation, both formative and summative, is essential. I recognise that many partnerships struggle to meet their goals with the process being time consuming and the collaborative process perceived as difficult (Weiss, Anderson, & Lasker, 2002). However, partnerships need people to make them happen. People act within a frame of reference located within their institutional identity. This combination of agency as agent and organisation is recognised by Marginson and Rhoades (2002) in their work on conceptualising Higher Education within globalisation processes. They indicate that both meanings, namely an agent can be an organisation with a particular purpose or an individual with a particular mandate. Thus, we can speak of the agent within the agency, implying an organisational structure, with mechanisms to articulate its purpose as agency, and individuals applying agency through manipulating the mechanisms available to them.

Partnership evaluation, therefore, requires a more complex frame of reference and it is here that I refer to the contemporary work of Rogers (2010). The first point in relating evaluation to partnerships is to pose the question, why use a partnership approach? The reason for this question is to critique whether the particular problem/issue is best served by a partnership rather than a single institutional context. What will the partnership provide that the single institution cannot achieve? An example of this is seen in social policy in the UK where joined-up solutions for social exclusion are linked to new ways for tackling inequalities, for modernization, innovation, participation and empowerment (Asthana, Richardson, & Halliday, 2002 p 781). Here the strategy moves to local action zones as a domain for change. The authors develop a framework for evaluation with emphasis on inputs, processes and outcomes, impacts and principles, while recognising context and the iterative and

cumulative effects of partnerships. Emphasis is placed on the relevance to stakeholders. The work indicates the importance of building a coherent, logical and comprehensive rationale for "partnershipping", which takes into account overlapping agendas and political imperatives. A perspective on this is provided by Atkinson (2005), who indicates that,

> *"the emergence of partnership working in the past decade reflects a desire to move from the development of policy and the planning and delivery of services within fragmented organisational and professional silos to an integrated multi-sectoral and multi-professional approach that will deliver improvements in outcomes"* (Atkinson, 2005 p 2).

He suggests a framework which considers impact, vision and leadership, partnership dynamics, strategy and performance management, cost effectiveness, participation and influence (p.6).

Rogers (2010) indicates key phases in relation to conflict resolution and consensus – building, knowledge/information sharing, networking and accountability. Thus, while the obvious benefit of partnering is synergy and collaboration (Cross et al., 2009; Weiss et al., 2002), the pertinent evaluation question is in what ways is the partnership adding value through collaboration, given the possibility of partnership inertia, power differentials and complexity, namely uncertainty, ambiguity, risks, and unintended consequences as indicated in the literature (Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Van Mierlo, Arkesteijn, & Leeuwis, 2010).

The literature indicates a substantial range of partnerships and that they are growing in number (Selsky & Parker, 2005 p 850). The concomitant research and evaluation challenges include issues of size, shape, locality, formality, quality, and the various discipline related theories in which they are located. Moreover, the field of evaluation itself is a very broad one, and the number of evaluation questions that can be posed about partnerships is extensive. In order to provide initial focus, I draw on the framework suggested by (Owen & Rogers, 1999) that includes a typology to assist in identifying the purpose of the evaluation in relation to the project or programme. These forms include proactive, clarificative, interactive, monitoring and impact evaluation. I elaborate on this through reference to (Rogers & Williams; Williams, 2010) who have taken the field forward to locate evaluation

more directly in the systems and complexity field. These writers emphasise the necessity to separate evaluation into strands where the situation is (i) simple; (ii) complicated; and, in cases where there is a problem, (iii) complex (Rogers & Williams, 2010). These ideas provide a framework for systemic evaluation which appreciates that systems exhibit complex adaptive behaviour.

Evaluation requires the evaluator to engage in a process of sense making (Weick, 2005), which in partnerships requires the ability to appreciate that the different institutional actors will have different sense-making models influenced by the institutional cultures and purposes in which they are embedded. These models influence boundaries as to what is considered plausible and rational by the various actors.

Mizikaci (2006 p 38) refers to different aspects of quality in partnerships, the most significant of which are probably fitness for purpose and transformation.

One overriding lesson drawn from experience is that while it is helpful and necessary to design evaluation into projects from the very beginning, the emergent realities are going to require reflection and modification as time progresses. This feeds into a discussion clarifying the evaluation efficiency and suggests that the evaluation process is not cumbersome and burdensome, but that it focuses on directed issues as succinctly as possible.

Although generic aspects of a partnership are possible to identify, the context and focus of the partnership are going to inform the partnership logic and hence the evaluation challenges. The dominant one is that there are simultaneous sense-making processes in different organisations interspersed with iterative co-sense making.

Rogers (2010) indicates that the characteristics of complexity result from multi-site, multi governance contexts, where there are simultaneous and often alternative causal strands at work. Recursive causality and tipping points create emergence properties. These are all characteristics of the wicked problems. In human situations, this requires complex negotiations, which is highly reflective of characteristics of social partnerships.

Moreover, with partnerships there is also the need to draw out our understanding of collaborative advantage itself (Huxham & Vangen, 2005), as well as the characteristic of collaborative inertia – the slowness often associated with partnerships. Huxham and Vagen

(2005 p 773) indicate the reasons for this inertia as being the difficulty of finding focus, differences in language and meaning, differences in organisational cultures, difficulty in determining collective modes of operation, difficulties with perceived power imbalances and trust building, mutual accountability for a venture requiring autonomy, and the logistics associated with multiple spread sites.

In considering the type of partnerships that the FET Colleges and businesses are involved in, many of the ambiguities around partnerships ought to be relatively easy to resolve. The purpose appears relatively straightforward, which is to integrate training needs with training opportunities. However, the paucity of partnershipping indicated by the participants in the research process indicates a need for deeper investigation. While superficially this might be attributed to the immature domain of partnerships in South Africa, it is likely that the complexities associated with workforce planning and collective training are deeper than anticipated by policy frameworks. It would appear that partnership inertia (Huxham & Vangen, 2005) has to be investigated in this particular context.

## New developments in partnerships

I refer to recent work by Svensson and Nillson (2008) in order to inform the possibility of some difficulties associated with partnerships for innovation and social change. Svensson and Nilsson indicate four dilemmas in relation to partnerships.

The first dilemma relates to the relationship between an organisational perspective and an individual perspective. The key issue relates to the power of the individual in relation to meaningful decision making in the partnership. Will they have real influence or simply act as a functionary in the organisational operations?

The second concerns the difference between a holistic approach to a partnership, incorporating multi-level embedded issues, and a specific targeted goal and approach. As they put it, will talking about the broader issues receive more attention than completing the action as identified by the immediate stakeholders?

The third problematizes the relationship between partnerships and democracy. In particular, what boundaries are set as to who participates and informs the decision making process? Does the partnership add value or diminish the democratic process in which the

individual lives out their rights and responsibilities? Are beneficiaries objectified or are they subjects in their own right?

The fourth dilemma is particularly powerful in that it raises the issue of vested interests.

> "*can a consensus organisation really change a system of which it is a part? If the members in a partnership represent the existing power structure, will they not have a strong interest in the preservation of these unequal relationships. We will see if issues of power, conflicts and differences in interests are put aside in the partnership organisations.*"  Svensson and Nillson (2008)

Having considered the evidence from a range of case studies and taking into account these dilemmas, Svensson and Nillson indicate a more sophisticated frame of reference, namely asking whether partnerships are useful and in what situations are they appropriate. Thereafter they inquire into the conditional factors which affect partnerships.

Their interpretation of their data is (i) that the system/agent gap is problematic and that the partnerships in the case studies they used have not facilitated mediation; (ii) that ambiguity remains an ongoing situational issue between broad and holistic approaches and narrow and defined ones;  (iii) that the partnerships do not vitalise democracy to any significant degree; and, finally, (iii) that there is a high level of consensus in their partnerships which tends to support the status quo in inter-institutional politics.

While they accept the limitations of the partnership approach as reflected in their findings, the authors nevertheless believe that learning from the case studies to improve partnership practice is valuable and can inform sustainable change efforts.

## Critiquing partnerships

While I personally build my living theory around new partnerships, I do not do so naively. I recognise that partnerships not only need to be evaluated, but that the whole discourse around partnerships needs to be critiqued.

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development has produced a recent report with a focus on international development, which provides a useful critique on partnership thinking. (Utting & Zammit, 2006) claim that a partnership ideology has emerged that

emphasises mobilisation between the private sector and the UN and which reflects desirable objectives within a "feel good" discourse. They state that,

> *"Although there has been a rapid scaling up of partnerships, relatively little is known about their contribution to basic UN goals associated with inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. While considerable effort has gone into advocating partnerships, far less attention has been paid to developing the analytical tools and capabilities needed to adequately assess their development impacts and implications, and to draw lessons for the way ahead"* (p 1).

They spell these goals out as;

> *"patterns of economic growth, resource distribution and decision-making processes that contribute to reducing social and income deprivation and inequalities, enhancing people's rights and empowering groups who historically have experienced marginalisation and injustice"* (p 1).

In their work (p 2) they consider (1*)* the various *"ideational, economic and political factors and forces underpinning the turn to PPPs (Public Private Partnerships) and the very different logics and agendas involved"*; (2) the proliferation of PPPs and the implications that scaling up and diversity of applications *has on objectives, relationships and impacts and the need for disaggregation and analysis*; (3) the weakness of evaluation (impact analysis); and (4) the institutional innovations and reforms that have emerged to support partnerships and partnership concerns. They also point out that UN PPPs have proliferated during a time of economic prosperity in the post 1990 era and that greater awareness of the impact of globalisation has led to greater corporate accountability being demanded.

In their work they also point out that partnerships need to be seen within the context of "*changing patterns of governance",* in which they indicate the differences between normative or good governance, (implying trust, collaboration, shared responsibility, participation), and structural governance (the changing role of the state and the emergence of civil society), which leads to "*adaptations in management practices*" (project based approaches) and,

> *"Perceptions regarding the roles and responsibilities of different development actors in the context of globalisation and liberalisation"* (p 2).

This underscores the growing appreciation of the need to rethink the way we establish boundaries to our thinking, learning and acting. Scharmer (2009), in his paper, speaks in the same vein of Capitalism 3.

In summarising this sub-section I present the following comment from (Ansari et al., 2001):

> *"Effective CPs (Community Partnerships) pose many challenges as they comprise interactions between multiple human, managerial and operational factors within complex policy, organizational, physical and social settings. They require representation and communication, coordination and collaboration, structure and organisation, accountability and feedback, and rules and procedures. They also necessitate commitment and contributions, interactions and consultation, tolerance and agreement, and represent a variety of administrative and personnel challenges to the participating agencies. A consistent theme is that successful are dependent on quality leadership"* (Ansari et al., 2001 p 502)

## Reflections on my living theory of partnerships

The core challenges incorporated into the FET dialogue in which I have participated have included extremely substantive issues. These are, from one perspective, the quality, type, relevance and flow of entrants into the workforce. From another perspective they are the capacity of the economy to absorb work-seekers. Yet another perspective highlights the frustration of communities living with poverty as a consequence of unemployment, their perceptions of social justice, including the equity gaps and their anger in feeling that they have been betrayed by their government. A final perspective worth including is the impact of globalisation, international competitiveness and the impact of the global economic recession.

However, the importance I place on people having the opportunity for gainful employment, and for government, business and civil society to see this as a collective responsibility is the fundamental value I assume throughout this thesis. The mechanism that this thesis advocates is that of partnerships based on the new partnership discourse. I take the policy mandate for the FET Colleges to act responsively and to develop partnerships as a legitimate, desirable and ultimately achievable route.

It is against this background that I have articulated the premises on which my living theory is based and the role I have played as virtual consultant to the FET Colleges and academic

programme leader to the participating managers from the sector. I have led the reader through an understanding of what is meant by new partnerships and have shown how this thinking has:

- influenced my personal philosophy of transformation;

- informed my theory of institutional capacity and interaction;

- reflected my understanding of systems and complexity thinking;

- revealed the implications of social capital;

- emphasised the creativity space provided;

- influenced the development of my propositions with regard to partnership intelligences;

- validated my appreciation of connective leadership; and

- presented ideas for development in relation to new partnership evaluation.

Moreover this has been done within a framework of new partnership critique.

The premises described add substance to my living theory of new partnerships as a construct and indicate not only the positive nature of social transformation through new partnerships, but also reflect much that could be described as the living contradictions, showing the complexity of the desired social change to which the FET Colleges are intended to contribute. This chapter was intended to inform the thesis in relation to what is meant by new partnerships and how they require an imaginative theoretical construction to act as a critical vision along which the pathway of transformation can be laid.

**Applying new partnership theory to data collection and analysis**

In my data collection and analysis, my concern was to look for indications of an emergent discourse on new partnerships, nuanced to the South African situation. Thus, I was seeking to discover evidence of a way of thinking that reflected an understanding of the institutional importance of the FET Colleges and the need for them to reflect developing engagement mechanisms and an awareness of the problems associated with inter-institutional relationships. In particular, I was looking for concrete awareness of the roles the staff could play in informing strategy, forging relationships and building the capacity of the organisation to engage through partnerships.

# Chapter 4
# Research Process

## Introduction

In Chapter 2, I covered the key foundational dimension of this research, namely a historical or past-orientated perspective informing the present situation as experienced in the FET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. This was intended to provide the necessary understanding of the historical context in which the research into the responsivity and preparedness for transformation of the FET Colleges is embedded. Thus Chapter 2 focused on developing an appreciative understanding of the history and context of the FET sector in South Africa. Chapter 3 provides an understanding of how new partnership thinking has informed my living theory concerning transformation in the FET sector. This chapter, Chapter 4, provides an understanding of the research process, namely Creative Holism as an approach to Critical Systems Research. Chapter 5 will hereafter provide insight into the contemporary situation in the FET Colleges, as expressed by the practitioner managers in their role as student participants. Chapter 6 will draw particularly on SSM and Chapter 7 on will draw on the Viable Systems Methodology, used as a design process, to provide a framework for a future orientation. I have made the assumption that the reader has some familiarity with systemic thinking and its methodologies.

In this introduction, it is important to note some ethical considerations. Permission was sought from and formally granted by the collective of Rectors in a formal meeting for the study to be undertaken. Moreover all the participants signed letters of agreement. However, as my mandate was one of research and not as an external consultant, I devised the approach of virtual consultant as a means of framing the kind of action orientated living theory approach. In this way I was able to illustrate my practice. The table provided (table 1) sets this out.

## Interpretive Research

My foundational position with regard to research is that it is first and foremost about the researcher because he or she chooses the research. Therefore, there is always a critical element in that research is about knowledge creation and the holders of knowledge are in a

position of having power over those who do not. Thus, the social construction of knowledge is a political act. This is most apparent in social research where the perspective of the researcher has always been an issue. The tension is between the researcher "neutralising self" and seeking external impartiality and the removal of all bias, or the researcher "embracing self" and working with acknowledged subjectivity, thus understanding the need to have a very clearly articulated view of self and a theory of personal agency, taking into account this reality as a declared perspective. In my work, I determine to embrace self because the nature of my work is about agency for change. If I am an agent for change, my work has a political connotation.

The first consideration in making sense of my research work is best understood by means of reference to practitioner research, Fox et al., (2007). In constructing this thesis, I am first and foremost a practitioner doing research to inform and improve my practice. I refer to the work of Allwright (2005), who considers practitioner research to be "*a relationship of identity between the people being investigated and the people doing the investigation*". According to this author, practitioner research must be written in the first person plural, about the (professional) lives of the practice being investigated, being concerned more with understanding than problem solving. It must focus on issues of agency – between those who create an understanding and those who use it in an organic way, looking for deep human understanding and not merely abstract scientific understanding. Lived experience may not necessarily be described, but may remain tacit and transmitted behaviourally through working together(Allwright, 2005 p 357).

In my case, this has included using methodology which embeds the realisation that teaching is not merely about transmitting knowledge, but personally experiencing learning associated with that knowledge. Thus, I use Creative Holism as a multi-methodological framework, considered to be best practice in the field of systems thinking research. However, I do this from the perspective of being an aspirant living theorist, with my research entwined in my own value conflicts and inconsistencies.

Social research is always about engaging with the subjects and their subjectivity. I have drawn on (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) metaphor of dialogue during a journey, as a journey

allows time for the exploration of ideas. This means surfacing the natural responses and then examining them in the cut and thrust of dialogue.

A research conversation needs a theme, and in this case, the theme that has been developed is that responsivity through new partnerships is core to the purpose of the FET Colleges as it is informed by policy, managed by professionals and responsive to training and employment issues in specific social and geographic spaces.

I understand the validity of qualitative research as being in the coherence between the participants in their contribution to a narrative, nuanced and extended by their nuances. The vehicle for integration is the meaning made by the researcher who validates it through locating it alongside complementary narratives. Therefore, in the research that follows, I need to provide evidence that the participants are engaging with their situation and interpreting it individually and collectively, thus revealing perspectives, agreements and disagreements. The narrative is validated through its linkage to the policy frameworks they refer to and observation of the contexts in which they are working.

## Critical Systems Research

A comprehensive basic understanding of systemic thinking is provided by Armson (2011) and a robust account of the history of the systems approach to management leading to his theory of CRT is provided by Jackson (2000, 2001, 2003, 2010) and Reynolds and Holwell (2010). In these accounts they describe the history of the different traditions in the systems movement as it relates to the science of management.

### The three phases of systems thinking development

In considering the systems approach to the science of management, I think it is important to mention the three phases in the development of systems thinking. The first phase, in the work of Ackoff (1981), is the emergence of systems thinking as an alternative approach to traditional scientific enquiry, where a reductionist approach associated with positivism is used. This approach still substantively influences the operations approach to management and is still taught widely. The systems  approach (as in systemic) does not break things down to understand more and more detail at lower levels of reduction, but rather looks outward for connections, inter-relationships and situatedness, rather like phenomenology, which

emphasises the importance of context and the emergence of phenomena within their distinctive situation. Both phenomenology and systems thinking emphasise that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and that with each level of reduction something is lost. The systemic approach appreciates that as more and more inclusive boundaries are drawn, new properties of the systemic integration become evident. Thus, the early systems discourse attempted to move thinking from mechanistic and closed views of the organisation to more dynamic organic models, which took greater account of openness to environments and experimenting with different boundary options.

This second phase in the history of systems thinking is reflected in a discourse which brought to the fore "soft" systems, as opposed to "hard" systems. This contribution is directly attributable to Checkland. (2010). The shift in thinking is reflective of the awareness that some systems can be engineered, they might be complicated, but all the parts can be identified and all relationships sequentially identified, while others are the consequence of the way we think about things. Such "soft" systems are far more conceptual and individual and are the consequence of learning and interpretation. Thus soft systems are about individual learning and are, in the language of educators, constructivist.

The third phase is reflected in the work of Jackson (2001, 2003, 2010), who saw the growing number of methodologies that lay claim to being systemic and therefore worked at understanding the conditions under which different approaches were more appropriate as a means of intervention. This pursuit caused him to develop an appreciation of critical awareness, which is reflected in his system of systems methodologies. Thus, Jackson's approach assumes a position in the systems literature which moves beyond the rather elementary division between "hard" and "soft" systems. He draws on the work of (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) and uses their four paradigm model of social theory to create a typology of systems approaches, which he refers to as the functionalist, interpretive, emancipatory and postmodern paradigms. This paradigmatic framework posits that there are two key discernible opposing positions which are reflected in their work.

I have indicated that Critical Systems Thinking has been developed predominantly through the work of Jackson. His major concern was to consolidate work that had been done by a number of practitioner academics seeking to build a theoretical base for management

studies that differed from the scientific management paradigm and which worked from the alternative paradigm offered by systems thinking. In so doing, Jackson drew on sociology as a discipline and the analysis of social theory as a field. He drew on the work of Burrell and Morgan and extended thinking through critically engaging with their typological framework. Their framework differentiates between assumptions and explanations we make about **nature of society**, namely whether we believe we should be promoting and working for radical change, or whether we should be working for regulating society, according to an understanding of how society ought to function. Radical change appreciates the conflict-ridden nature of society, whereas regulation privileges the maintenance of the status quo. It also differentiates between an **understanding of what social science is,** namely whether it is an objective science, understanding reality as hard, objective and external with a deterministic orientation, or whether it is a constructivist science, appreciating the subjectivity of knowing and the importance of appreciating learning and sense making. These differences have significant implications for preferred research methodology, with objective approaches favouring quantitative approaches and subjective approaches favouring qualitative approaches.

Jackson makes it clear that systems approaches and methodologies are were not designed as social theories, but as intervention strategies with empirical support being built through their successful and continued use and refinement. However, the various methodologies have embedded assumptions, either tacit or explicit, in relation to the originators and refiners of the methodologies and in relation to the nature of society and in understanding the nature of social science. As a researcher, Jackson was concerned in making the linkage more formal and explicit, and hence his typology.

## Critical Systems Thinking

Thus, Critical Systems Research, and Creative Holism as a manifestation of it, is a multi-methodological approach and is informed by critical awareness, improvement and pluralism (Jackson, 2003 p 303). Critical awareness refers to developing an understanding of the impact of human actions and the multiple probable outcomes and unintended consequences being experienced. Improvement implies that action in the world by systems practitioners is intended to result in improvement rather than a complete solution because

whole solutions are too complex for human intervention. Rather, improvement takes the form of steps which are incremental over time and which need to be constantly re-grounded as circumstances, people and institutions change and adapt. Plurality reminds us that there are various perspectives and that which might be a solution for one person or group can in fact possibly make the situation worse for other stakeholders. Jackson suggests that Creative Holism as a meta-methodology has four main steps to it, namely; creativity, choice, implementation and reflection.

**Creativity** is intended to extract the dominant concerns and problems and to ensure that all four paradigms are considered when coming to grips with the issues. This includes making decisions about the hierarchy embedded in the issues, which are the more dominant and which are dependent or subsidiary. **Choice** involves deciding which of the generic systems methodologies is most appropriate to the dominant issue and deciding which tools and techniques to use to inform the methodology. **Implementation** involves working with the tools and techniques until positive change proposals are arrived at and implemented which are likely to bring about meaningful change, taking into account the concerns of the various paradigms. **Reflection** is about being able to draw out the learning related to the problem situation, and way in which the methodology, and tools and techniques were used in order to produce relevant research findings.

Jackson further explains that this methodology is intended to provide a holistic perspective, meaning that because the problem situation is viewed from four different paradigmatic perspectives, different aspects will be illuminated. Further, the multi-paradigmatic perspective is managed through designing an intervention based on the most appropriate methodology for what is judged to be the dominant concern with an awareness of other dependent methodologies in the background to be brought forward as and when appropriate. He makes the point that by being explicit about paradigms and managing them in this way, multi-paradigm considerations are managed and do not cause confusion.

The creativity phase in this thesis is reflected in critiquing the key research question, namely, "How can I as an academic practitioner engage with Further Education and Training practitioner managers during a formal qualification to inform their personal and institutional responsivity through partnerships?" It is more fully explored through an analysis of the

students' written work and tutorial conversations through which they provided an array of insights into their situation.

One refinement that Jackson makes to accommodate the various systems methodologies is the need to deconstruct Burrell and Morgan's (1979) notion of radical structuralism in order to appreciate the distinction between structuralism and positivism as different forms of objectivism. This is considered important as some methodologies draw on structuralism, especially cybernetics on which the Viable Systems Methodology is founded. Jackson makes the point that, according to Burrell and Morgan, one has to understand the four quadrants as being distinctive paradigms and that these are therefore incommensurable with distinctive knowledge claims and knowledge products. Working with organisations, however, often requires perspectives drawn from different paradigms, which raises the question of the relative nature of knowledge. This is a view that constructivists appreciate, but those who are more functionalist with absolute ideas will find far more difficult to embrace. The innovative way that Jackson uses to build towards finding commensurability is through the use of metaphors. His view is that metaphors provide lenses into organisations in the same way that paradigms can be considered lenses.

In terms of the critical dimension, Jackson draws on the thinking of Habermas, who makes a distinction between technical and practical interest. Habermas also argues for emancipatory interest which emphases the way in which knowledge is linked to power. Jackson also draws on Habermas' notion of hermeneutics informed by his psychoanalytic persuasion, thus raising the issues of the potential for self-deception and rationalisation and the need to strive for the ideal speech to ensure validity. Validity is the consequence of speech being intelligible, that it is propositionally true, that the speaker is justified in the societal milieu in which it is uttered, and that it is spoken with sincerity.

Jackson summarises Habermas' conditions under which speech can be considered ideal, which include the equality of opportunity to participate, that there is no domination either latent or overt, that the discourse is free to flow and is open to affective as well as cognitive interpretation. Society becomes emancipated as the space for ideal speech is extended. These ideas, underpin the notion of criticality in discourse.

As I have indicated, in his earlier work Jackson devised a system of Systems Methodologies in which he located various methodologies. The key determinants of decision making in relation to methodological selection are, on the one hand, whether the problem/ organization/situation is simple or complex (complex means it contains paradoxes and goes beyond being merely very complicated) and, on the other hand, the political situation in which the problem/organization/ situation is embedded. Unitary means there is a common understanding between the participants in a situation whereas plurality means that there is confusion and misunderstanding, but good-will is present to co-construct solutions. In the above typology, Jackson underplays complexity and change, which become more evident in his later work. Whichever paradigm one works with, it needs to be cognisant with complexity thinking. Complexity science is all embracing and points out the discontinuities in our ability to be totally predictive.

As indicated above, Jackson drew on the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979. His reflective development of his theory led him to move beyond the six fields of his System of Systems Methodologies and refine it into the framework presented as Creative Holism, which only has four fields identified by four types of questions, but which is closely aligned with the four fields defined by Burrell and Morgan above.

The particular kinds of questions that are asked by critical systems practitioners and researchers are best approached through the appropriate paradigm as expressed through the four types of questions he poses. Four broad categories of questions are positioned in the following diagram and are intended to indicate that interpretive questions focus on exploring purposes, functional questions focus on improving goal seeking and viability, radical humanist questions focus on the promotion of diversity, and radical structuralist questions focus on ensuring fairness. To put it differently, if after careful consideration of a problematic situation your conviction is that the key issue is about understanding the perspectives on issues of purpose of different stakeholders then the interpretive paradigm and commensurate methodologies are appropriate.  If after deliberation you consider the core question is one of the functionality of the organisation then you will locate your intervention within the functionalist paradigm and you will draw on methodologies associated with that paradigm. If the core question is representative of issues of fairness and justice then the appropriate systemic paradigm is radical structualist and a

methodology associated with this paradigm is appropriate. If the question is one about the promotion of diversity the appropriate systemic paradigm is that of post-modernity with its strong dimension of relativism.

| Promoting Diversity (post Modern) | Ensuring Fairness (Radical Structuralism) |
|---|---|
| Exploring Purposes(Interpretivism) | Improving Goal Seeking and Viability (Functionalism) |

**Table 6 : Jacksons Creative Holism Framework**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology and the process of data collection on which this thesis is embedded. Thus, the nature of the question being addressed, namely, *"How can I, as an academic practitioner[9], engage with Further Education and Training College practicing managers during a formal qualification in order to inform organisational responsivity to engage with new partnerships in the sector, with the intention to enhance the quality of life of their students?"* needs to be considered from the perspective of how best to inform it. At its root, the question is one informing leadership practice within a complex set of circumstances in which FET College managers find themselves situated with a view to improvement.

The methodology used in this thesis is based in Critical Systems Thinking. I believe it is important to reveal my thought processes in this regard. The following diagram is intended to facilitate engagement with the research process

|  | CREATIVITY | CHOICE | IMPLEMENTATION | REFLECTION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | The creativity framework was informed by the conceptual framing of Creative Holism |  |  |  |
| Phase 1 | Realising the research opportunity space provided by the participants and | Determining that it was important to develop as many insights through the perceptions of the various FET College Managers into | Utilizing Soft Systems Methodology tools (rich pictures and associated narratives drew out the issues requiring | Awareness that the dominant issues were more to do with institutional |

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[9] I have described my role as " a virtual consultant"

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | linking this to my resolve to do research in the FET arena and its responsivity to its mandate | responsivity. The selected method to do this was to draw from the philosophy and practice of Soft Systems Methodology | resolution within the individuals | challenges and that institutional challenges dampened the enthusiasm of the participants in responsivity |
| Phase 2 | Drawing on the learning from Phase 1 and considering the nature of the challenge considered a next step | Selected VSM as a process methodology to design a framework for institutional growth which emphasises participatory engagement | Designed a VSM framework | Considered the implications of taking this further |

**Figure 1 : Research process**

My first decision was to make my concern with living theory a foundational concern. In other words, it would be considered from an ontological perspective embedded in my world-view. My reason for this is a simple one. For me, the purpose of teaching and engaging with students is primarily about agency. It is about them being empowered through their learning to make a difference in their organisations. Thus, for me, learning is not merely an esoteric contemplative act, it is also an energizing act for engagement with the world.

My foundational concern was to bring an informed systemic approach to the research which is argued in this chapter. This is expressed through the Creative Holism framework. Creative Holism allows for a sequenced and layered approach. The sequence is determined through an appreciation of the dominant concern and an appreciation of sub-concerns that could either become dormant or dominant as the research proceeds informed by the dominant concern. It will be seen in this thesis that the dominant concern of responsivity revealed more and more of the underlying problem, that of the viability of the organisation which was hindering the dominant concern of responsivity. Thus the shift is to this dominant issue through the presentation of a viability matrix as a proposed outcome for action.

 My dominant (as opposed to foundational) intervention takes into account the turbulent history of the sector and focuses on the perspectives represented by the practitioner managers and strives to facilitate a co-construction of their understanding of their experiences and then to build an understanding of how they can co-construct responsive social value through partnerships. Thus, the intervention is intended to inform their

understanding of stakeholder relationships. At a stretch, I anticipate that they might create a community of practice amongst themselves, certainly during the duration of their formal qualification, and feed into it the strategic processes of their individual colleges. I chose Soft Systems Methodology to be the initial dominant methodology, which is based in what Jackson refers to as the interpretive paradigm.

Critical research, in the various forms it has emerged, including critical systems research, tests the politics of knowledge and exposed one of the key tenets of research, namely its supposedly unbiased nature. Critical research reveals the embedded politicization of knowledge and exposes the myth of positivism as being the only way of viewing the world from a scientific perspective. Critical systems research poses the question concerning whose interest is being served by the knowledge created, and who and what it legitimates. How this process of legitimization feeds into the constructs of power and dominion becomes a critical consideration.

In this research, I therefore made the assumption that the group I was working with had a vested interest in the functioning of the FET Colleges, but that they found themselves confronted by mandates coming from above, as well as arguments coming from below. This is the inevitable position of middle management.

## Creative Holism and data

Critical systems thinking research, in this case methodologically framed as Creative Holism, demands a number of interacting data forms. The first is one of immersion in a system. It is only through immersion that one can appreciate the various perspectives that are at play in the situation and become conversant with the issues and the stakeholders. Thus, this crucial process of interaction needs tools and instruments to capture the various perspectives. Critical systems thinking research often uses rich pictures as an important tool. A rich picture is intended to capture as many different aspects and perspectives of a situation as the researcher is able to consider. Thus, a form of snowballing occurs, where one participant will make reference to another whom they think has an important view.  Rich pictures require observation and dialogue with the stakeholders in order to inform them. They also need to be used as story-boards to feed back the information to all stakeholders in order for

them to appreciate the disconnections and cross purposes that are inevitable in human situations.

Besides rich pictures, other forms of primary data collection are inevitably one or other form of dialogical engagement with ideas being tested in relation to the various perspectives as they emerge. Devices such as multiple cause diagrams are another form of representations extracted from conversations.

The artefacts associated with the organization and individuals in it are a further form of primary data. However, the discussions and contradictions around interpretation are the substance of criticality, with sense making being the end goal. This includes making sense of the sense making process exhibited by the participants in the dialogical situation.

## Creative Holism and the interpretation of data

As in all research, primary data forms the substance from which meaning is extracted through analysis and interpretation. Creative Holism, as a form of Critical Systems research, focuses on determining a logical starting point for informed action to bring about improvement in a situation. Therefore, the heuristic device most often employed is that of drawing on metaphor. From the use of metaphor, dominant problems are surfaced and the primary concern is postulated. The use of metaphor is a form of creativity and is used in critical systems thinking, including Creative Holism, to facilitate enquiry. The dominant metaphors that are drawn on are that of the machine, the organism, the brain, a culture and a political environment. Thus, one questions whether the problem is about production (the machine), about entrenched behaviours (a culture) or about power (political). This assists in determining the primary concern for engagement.

Another dominant form of analysis is in the form of designing and drawing models representative of systemic action. In this research, this will be indicated through reference to root definitions, human activity and viable systems models.

## A caveat

On reflection, while it would be my desire to enrol students into living theory and use this to co-focus on the research question, I am aware that it has taken me quite some time to develop an appreciation for what it is and what it entails. I also realised that I had to go

through phases in my own learning as I engaged with different learning theorists with different concepts about learning and was continually enthused by new insights into the power we can have over our own learning, as individuals, institutions and organisations. This is indicated in the paper I have referred to above (Hardman & Averweg, 2011). Given an appreciation of the learning backgrounds of most learners and the dominance of other peoples' propositional knowledge that they have encountered, I want my students to take steps towards becoming practitioner researchers themselves. This is a value based goal I have set as I want to encourage them to realize their own power to create a learning goal for themselves and design a personal route to get there, with my role being one of mentorship and supervision. I believe it would be unrealistic to expect people on a Post-Graduate Diploma to become critical systems practitioners, but if they are able to conduct a good piece of practitioner research, which is characterised by the authentic posing of a question which they can justify as informing their practice, and pursue a process to create appropriate knowledge, I believe that they have substantiated my value based goal. I see it as a value based goal because it emphasises their power as learners to determine their own learning needs in order to improve their practice and in so doing develop not only their competence, but also their confidence and contribution. Moreover, especially for those having responsibility for the learning of others, as indeed is the case with the FET managers, it empowers them to develop a greater appreciation of the needs of their learners. This implies a greater understanding of personal responsibility for and engagement in learning. This in turn implies a learning methodology which is understood, participatory and enquiry driven.

However, because of the usefulness of soft systems methodology as a foundational methodology in appreciating different perspectives and facilitating democratic decision making, I embedded it in the programme in the module on Contemporary Issues in Professional Practice. This module is designed to develop appreciation of different perspectives around core issues of significance to a particular cadre. In this case, the focus was on understanding the challenges in the FET colleges which hindered their responsivity.

I accept that while my dominant interest is in understanding and contributing to thinking about partnerships as a mechanism of responsivity, the individual practitioner managers have different, possibly more immediate and direct challenges in relation to their work.

Therefore, although I was open in sharing my learning agenda, I did not impose it on the practitioner managers other than in the particular module on partnerships where the purpose was to develop their knowledge and understanding of partnerships as a mechanism for responsivity.

## Question construction

I now use the above to explain how my research questions were constructed, with the primary question being fore-grounded in an appreciation of South Africa's recent political history and within that, the role that what we now refer to as Further Education has played, and how the contemporary situation has emerged. In this context, the literature and my personal awareness make it clear that although there are high expectations for the sector, there is a justified belief that the FET colleges are not performing to their potential. The policy documentation privileges the notion of responsivity and emphasises partnership building as a key component of responsivity. Thus, I pose the fundamental research question, namely, *"How can I as an academic practitioner engage with Further Education and Training College practitioner managers during a formal qualification in order to inform their responsivity through partnerships?"*

In Chapter 3, I provided, through the literature, previous research I have undertaken and personal observation, a nuanced understanding of the emergence of the contemporary situation in the FET Colleges. I work on the assumption that while we cannot use the past to predict the future, we can use interpretations of the past to gain insights into the present and appreciate some of the challenges we face in transformation. In Chapter 3, I drew on the extensive literature on the emergent phenomenon of social partnerships, and especially on the creative potential this has in reconstructing the social contract, which is fundamental to the successful functioning of the FET Colleges within the state, and the need for partnerships with the business community and civil society.

In the chapters ahead, and informed by the research approach described in this chapter, I intend to use critical systems research to delve more deeply into the dynamics existing in the FET Colleges as represented in the interactions between myself and the practitioner managers who were students on the Post-Graduate Diploma. Because this group were my major route into the FET Colleges as far as my research was concerned, I had to take into

account what was possible through our co-involvement in the life of the academic programme. Therefore, the nature of the particular Post-Graduate Diploma needs to be understood within the culture of the Leadership Centre in which it was housed. As programme director of this project, and having experience in the sector, I was able to influence the modules in relation to their customisation for the particular client group, which I did through interaction with my colleagues who were teaching the various modules. I personally taught the first module entitled "Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery" and later taught the module on "Managing Partnerships." I co-taught the last module on "Project Management" where my focus was on project evaluation. Moreover, I had on-going interaction through the group mentoring process I had put in place.  Thus, a dominant aspect of the creativity phase described above in the process of applying Critical Systems Methodology, as the first phase of Critical Systems Practice/Research above, came about through structuring a potential research process within the context provided by the opportunity to offer the Post-Graduate Diploma, influence its customisation, structure the roll-out of the module and embed the group mentoring dimension. However, the creativity phase requires that consideration be given to questions representative of all four paradigms. This is often done through using a set of metaphors drawn from the work of Morgan (1997)

In terms of Critical Systems research, I determined that the dominant research question needed to be to find out how plausible new partnerships are as a form of responsivity in the contemporary situation, what was hindering and promoting responsivity through partnerships, and what the various participants considered necessary preconditions for improving the partnering potential of the FET Colleges. I saw this as an interpretive question, appropriate to systems methodology, namely Soft Systems.

I saw this question as needing to be addressed before going on to the follow on question of how the FET Colleges as organisations can structure themselves to increase their viability. This refers to their ability to appreciatively understand their context and the stakeholders with whom they have to engage, and to structure themselves accordingly in order to enhance their responsivity. Clearly, this question, while drawing on the interpretive data provided by the Soft Systems phase of the research, required an approach based on a more functional paradigm. Hence, the decision to use the Viable Systems Methodology in order to

theorise a potential design for consideration is rationalised. I now wish to describe Soft Systems Methodology and Viable Systems Methodology in more detail and also consider the issue of paradigm commensurability, or the lack of it, which is implied by using more than one methodology.

## Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)

I have indicated that SSM is used as a dominant methodology, and that it is an interpretive approach. SSM is associated with both the learning cycle attributed to Kolb and the Action Research Cycle. This is well elaborated in the literature (Luckett & Grossenbacher, 2003).

As a methodology, SSM assumes that the best way to approach situations where people exhibit individual perspectives that might be perceived as divergent, yet exhibit a desire to work together in a situation which is problematic is through developing an appreciation of the various perspectives present. Thereafter, one can look for ways to accommodate them within an appreciation of a whole situational framework (referred to as the problematic situation) in which they are accommodated. Thus I am assuming that the various tensions existing in the sector inform a need for finding common ground upon which to base strategies for improvement.

Soft Systems Methodology focuses on learning as being systemic and reflects the purpose of the methodology as to facilitate learning. Thus, the methodology uses creativity, in particular the drawing of rich pictures, in order to stimulate multi perspective descriptive visualization as a core process of data collection and management (Longva, 2004; Molineux & Haslett, 2003, 2007).

I find SSM particularly useful in working with groups of educators, especially those familiar with the process of curriculum construction. SSM is a learning approach and is intended to provide a framework for the appreciation of different perspectives with the intention of consensus building. Thus, the process of visualisation (rich picture construction) is about focusing on concrete instancing of particular located problems, co-constructed with the participants and the judicious work of the facilitator into different perspectives which are juxtaposed. This construction provides an overview of different stakeholder perspectives. By viewing them in proximity to each other, the stakeholders intuitively develop an

appreciation that theirs is not the only perspective and that the solutions that some stakeholders apply, actually cause problems for others.

Thus, I approached the situation with the perspective that we all agreed that working in the FET sector is fraught with challenges and problems. This is commonly referred to as a mess in the systems nomenclature, a term attributed to Ackoff (1981). A mess is usually presented in one or other form of systemic diagram, often initiated in the form of a rich picture in which the various perspectives are captured.

After initial practice in the classroom situation, the students were requested to work collaboratively in their various colleges to construct rich pictures which they believed captured the essence of the various manifestations of problems that they were encountering. They were also required to provide narrative to inform the rich pictures. I used these various rich pictures and the identified themes to draw up a composite list of manifestations of the problem situations faced by the students in their daily practice as managers. These rich pictures were presented in assignments and discussed with the participants.

In reflecting on this problematical situation, my thinking was that for the FET Colleges to be able to exhibit the required responsivity through partnerships, this would need to be built on a platform of perceived integrated functionality in which the various staff members felt secure, confident and enabled to participate in furthering the mission of their respective College, and be able to participate insightfully in an inter-college forum, as afforded by their participation in the Post-Graduate Diploma Programme.

The classical approach to SSM is to capture the various perspectives through incorporating them sequentially through a series of interviews and combining this in a rich picture. A rich picture is usually a basic drawing using elementary drawing techniques, but which, through the drawing of various iterations, gives a good overview of the problematical situation. In Chapter 5, I draw on various rich pictures drawn by the participants as part of their assignment in which they spoke to colleagues in their respective Colleges and used this to present problematical situations as perceived by these stakeholders.

In the SSM approach, these rich pictures are used by the facilitator, in this case me, to identify and systemically interpret the problematical situation with a view to suggesting various improvement options which seem to address the embedded problems. These are identified by root definitions and embellished as Human Activity Systems. Root definitions are statements which determine a necessary transformation and consider the agency implications of its application. Human Activity Systems are models which are built to understand the implementation process. They are systemic actions which indicate various components reflected by reference to the mnemonic CATWOE. This is a device used to ensure that one clearly thinks through recommendations by considering who they are intended to benefit (customers); who the stakeholders and participants are (actors);, what the envisaged change mechanisms are going to impact (transformation); under what prevailing attitudinal, social and political conditions this likely to be successful (worldview); who needs to give permission or approval and who has the power to prevent the implementation (owners); and what environmental conditions could impact on the process (environment).

Thereafter, a comparison is made between the suggested improvements and the situation on the ground as reflected in the rich picture before a second round of engagement with the participants takes place, in which the feasibility of the suggested improvements is critically examined in order to determine its likely success. Finally, action plans are drawn up to implement the improvement strategy.

## The Viable Systems Methodology (VSM)

This thesis draws significantly on Viable Systems modelling (Beer, 1959, 1966, 1972, 1979, 1981, 1989b; Espejo, Schwaninger, & Bilello, 1996; Hoverstadt, 2010; Schwaninger, 2001, 2006; Yolles, 2004; Yolles & Iles, 2006). VSM has a completely different development trajectory to SSM. It was derived and developed in the work of (Beer, 1959, 1966, 1972, 1979, 1981, 1989b), who looked for the logic of organisational life by focusing on the way he perceived organisations. He saw them as clusters of human beings in which the separate intelligences of individuals needed to be understood in relation to the way people influence each other and, in particular, how managers seek to bring coherence and order to different people within a corporate organisational whole. He drew his inspiration from his

understanding of cybernetics, the science of control in intelligent life and man-built machines. He was drawn to autonomous systems which have inbuilt control systems, and especially to the human body in which function is a consequence of innate autonomous systems functioning. He drew predominantly on his detailed study of the human body and the intelligence function embedded in it. Conceptually, VSM is, therefore, underpinned by Jackson's functional paradigm, with an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness, described by Beer as viability seeking. Viability is perceived as the ability to take corrective action autonomously. In the context of an organisation, this means to be able to survive and adapt in a changing environment and having the internal institutional capacity to do so. Beer explained this interaction between the environment and the institution as informed by Ashby's law of requisite variety. This law indicates that there is always more variety in the environment than there is capacity to engage with it. Thus, management is a process of interpreting an environment through selection of clarifying a required perspective. In the FET sector, this translates into designing programmes that are targeted to groups where there is the likelihood of a viable number of students, rather than trying to meet the personal needs of individual students. The corollary of this is that the FET College is limited in meeting the requirements of the environment it serves by the internal capacity it has in providing for that environment. In other words, if the FET College is unable to contract staff in a particular field, even if there is a need for that competency, it cannot respond to that need. This will be elaborated in Chapter 7.

A further key dimension of VSM is that rather than consider the bureaucratic hierarchy within an organisation, one has to develop a perspective based on a conceptual hierarchy of function, which allows for the possibility of recursion. This means that the organisation must be designed in such a way that effective coordination occurs at different levels which speak to each other. This concept is referred to as subsidiarity and will be clarified in the context of the FET Colleges in Chapter 7. Subsidiarity is essentially about determining levels and protocols of decision making at various appropriate levels within an organization or network of organisations.

In the literature, VSM is used for two core organisational purposes. The first is in ***designing for viability*** – a process of conceptual design of the human architecture of an organisation with specific reference to communication and control systems. The second is ***diagnosing for***

*correction and improvement*; more of a communication and control audit system. In this research, VSM is used as a design template for suggesting a communication and control system which prioritizes responsivity through partnership management.

**The core elements of VSM**

VSM researchers have developed a model which not only has the key features of cybernetics, requisite variety, recursivity and subsidiarity, but also reflects five fundamental organizational processes which have to function efficiently if an organization is able to retain its viability, that is to thrive and develop in a constantly changing environment. Five core systems are essential in organisational viability, these being purpose, coordination, audit, knowledge management and strategy. The five recursive levels are linked through six vertical channels.

## *The Principles of VSM*

Although I provide a brief description of these principles here, they are contextually elaborated on in Chapter 7.

*Cybernetics* is the science of control. It is the science of understanding how control systems work and decisions are made. In the VSM, cybernetics is informed by technical systems, for example how control is created over sound waves for transmission through the ether, as well as how control is maintained in the human body, with special reference to the intelligence function and how decisions are made. In the case of organic controls, the emphasis is on autonomous systems, which are systems that are self-directing and self-correcting through internal process mechanisms which engage with the environment. VSM is particularly interested in and focused on how individuals with their particular autonomous responsiveness can be aligned into organizational responsivity.

*Requisite variety*, a concept attributed by Beer throughout his works to Ashby (1956), who indicates that for an organism or organization to be viable, that is to remain alive and adapt, it needs to have more capability to act than the challenges the environment presents. Thus, as the day gets hotter, the autonomous system in the body responds by cooling mechanisms kicking in. For organisations, however, requisite variety needs to be managed and an accommodation between the capacity and capability of the organization and its

environment needs to be developed. For example, while there is a huge potential for learners who require employability skills, in order to meet this, a variety of programmes and entry conditions need to be developed.

***Recursivity*** is the process of the hierarchical layering of organizational levels. The dominant idea is one of similarity between the levels in that they fit into each other.

***Subsidiarity*** is linked to the word subsidiary. The implication is that at each viable level within the organization decision making must be made by those operating at that level. There must not be unnecessary referring of issues up the system, but clarity must be built in through protocol so that those most informed by situations can make the decisions required in that specific context.

## *The Systems*

### *System 1 - Purpose*

Beer acknowledges that the intelligence function in an organization operates at many levels and that, in thinking of the organization, one has to think of the various sites and functions, the primary sub-units, and how they relate and add value to each other.  He refers to this as system 1 (S1), which can be constructed as a simple systems map.  There are those parts of the organization which can be identified and their function described and their individual and collective environments understood and defined. This spread of sites and functions implies different geographical locations as well as different functions and subsidiary relationships. However, it is this spread of elements that produce the system. Beer (1989, p 22) points out that,

> *"Systems of increasing complexity are nested within each other like so many Russian dolls or Chinese boxes) and that embedded viable systems interact in the same way with local environments that are particular to each of them – although they are (inevitably) subsets of the whole environment."*

While each part can be seen as part of the whole, they exhibit the ability to connect to and interact with an environment, absorbing and relating to environmental variety, while acknowledging the complexity of the whole is larger than that with which the particular viable system can relate. They have the ability to solve problems of a local nature. Their localized management must accept their place in the whole system and therefore act in

accordance with higher levels within the organization through co-ordination with other units, being responsive to audit, higher order decision making and policy frameworks.

In determining the system in focus, decisions need to be made concerning the boundaries of the system. One has to determine what the legitimate parts of the system are. This is an area where the work on systems boundaries becomes particularly important (Ulrich & Reynolds, 2010) because boundary judgments have particular political, economic social and environmental implications.

Line management ensures that each part of the organization is clearly defined in relation to its purpose. Each operating site is expected to operate in accordance with the instructions of the lead unit, while at the same time responding to its own environment.

It is this system that is particularly important in defining the FET Colleges mandate and creates an understanding of the various institutional configurations and the limits they face in relation to their ability to be self-managing. This will be a concern of chapter 7.

### *System 2 - Co-ordination*
No one part of the organization can function entirely independently from any other part. To achieve the broader purpose of the whole organization, the activities of each part have to be aligned to the whole. This is intended to ensure that all the parts act cohesively and harmoniously within a legal frame of reference. However, although management is in control of a situation of which it does not have full knowledge or appreciation of the level of complexity, it has to relate to those aspects of the environment which can be seen to relate directly to its viability.

Jackson (2000 p160) makes the point that if an organization is not working in harmony and goes into an emergency state, the various parts will tend towards self-interest, which will destabilize the whole system and cause dangerous oscillations. It is therefore essential that system 2 (S2) operates through co-ordinating the regulatory dimension of each sub-unit and locating it within the broader purposes of the organization. Thus, the co-ordination function needs to be competent in segmenting and focussing when organisations exhibit instability, in order to bring directed balance and harmony to the organization.

The control centres of the parts are linked, coordinated and integrated into the organizational regulatory centre and produce feedback both up and down the system. Esperjo and Gill see this coordination as a process of mutual adjustment between support functions and autonomous units so that they might function synergistically. They also suggest that the more

> *"teams can share common standards, approaches and values, the greater the chances that spontaneous lateral communication will occur, resulting in less reinvention of the wheel and more chance of synergy. The stronger these lateral links, which are both of a technological and human nature, the less the requirement for management to impose control from above and the greater the sense of autonomy and empowerment experienced by the subsumed primary activities."*
> (Esperjo and Gill, 1997a, p 3)

Britton and McCallion (1989) add a very useful addition to our thinking about coordination (S2). They suggest that there are the possibilities of pooled, sequential and reciprocal interdependence, which are hierarchical. Pooled interdependence implies drawing on common resources requiring allocation, sequential interdependence requires flows between entities and reciprocal interdependence implies iteration.

The system of coordination is particularly important in the FET Sector as decisions have to be made about resource allocations and programmes to be offered.

### System 3 – Audit and communication

This is the audit system providing direct operational access to S1 by ensuring that the rules and regulations promulgated by S2 are being adhered to. System 3 (S3) provides direct control rather than control mediated through the subsidiaries. This system will focus on particular issues throughout the organization and test them for their robustness.

Thus, System 3 provides an alternative information and feedback route to that provided by (S2), both of which feed into (S4) for the purposes of validation of (S2). However, (S3) is usually designed to provide information and interpretation thereof on directed aspects of enquiry into the organization. It is inclined to be sporadic rather than always regular and anticipated. However, to be effective it must be trusted by (S1) and (S2) in order to negate the development of defensive strategies. S3 is a mediating system in relation to control. It

utilizes the information contained in S1 and S2 to test against S4 and S5. It is thus centred on control.

Britton and McCallion (1989) refer to different kinds of communication channels, namely: (i) operational monitoring; (ii) command; and (iii) the anti-oscillation channel. They also emphasize the potential of S4 to improve the potentiality and capability of S1.

S1, S2 and S3 make up the 'autonomic management', which maintains internal stability and optimises performance within an established framework. However, they do not position the organization strategically.

The audit function is especially important in the FET Colleges. The quality of student learning and lecturer competency needs to be tracked, as well as student selection and placement. This is fundamental to this thesis and will be elaborated in Chapter 7.

### System 4 – Intelligence (Development)

This is the environment of decision making after information from S3 has been brought in. It is intended to capture all the relevant information about the organization's environment. For the organization to match its environment in variety, system 4 is crucial.

Jackson (2003) points out that Beer refers to the role of S4 as being one of "switching", By this he means that the decision making and policy frameworks of (S5) are informed by what is happening in (S1), (S2) and (S3) and, in turn, (S1), (S2) and (S3) are being informed by (S5). Thus attenuation and dampening are particularly important at this level.

This system (S4) houses the central operations of the organization and is seen as the level where the most complete analysis of the organization's environment and its capability resides. This is the system which will manage the face of the organization in and to the world, and manage the variety of the world into the organization, particularly in relation to its future orientation.

Once again, this is a system of fundamental consequence in the FET College sector as it is all about building the intensive knowledge base of opportunity for learning opportunities that are likely to lead to placements. This is picked up on in Chapter 7.

***System 5 - Policy***

This system is responsible for policy and for positioning the enterprise, thus giving it simplified direction. It is the level which has to deal with the paradox of balancing internal and external environments and maintaining stability within the organization. This system must articulate the identity and purposes of the organization to the wider system of which it is a part. It also needs to deal with the internal conflicts within the organization and provide the templates for organizational effectiveness.

Autonomic management can be thought of as being synonymous with single loop learning. Learning continues through on-going adjustments to improve the performance or efficiency of the system. However, when one considers the contribution of S4 and S5, double loop learning is a useful comparison. S4 and S5 are directed at the re-perception of the effectiveness of the system, thus impacting on S1-S3, as these lower order systems need to redirect efficiency towards a new effectiveness goal.

According to Espejo and Gill, (1997 p7), S4 and S5 offer *"complementary perspectives on the definition, adjustment and implementation of the organizational unit's identity"* and therefore need to be balanced.

I perceive that S5 will present difficulties to the FET Colleges as it concerns the strategic leadership and decision making processes in the sector. I elaborate in Chapter 7.

***The six channels***

The six vertical channels link the hierarchical levels of the organization and interlink the different systems (Leonard, 2009). This involves a process of contextual reinterpretation at each level in order to create coherence and understanding. The key thought here is that, if considered separately, both top-down and bottom-up approaches to management are ineffective. However, if a process of two-way feedback is created, messages can be reconfigured to make meaning at the level they are to be applied. This creates a growing interpretive understanding which should not weaken the intent of the message, but rather strengthen it though participatory sense making and customized authentic commitments. This is referred to as the regulatory centre embedded at each subsidiary level. The vertical channels are:

### Channel 1

Channel 1 connects all the levels through connecting system 1 at each level. This is intended to ensure that the purpose of each subsidiary level makes sense when interpreted by the level above and the level below. Thus, although the purposes of each level will be different, they will be complementary and coherent. These purposes will facilitate management by creating the necessary management regulations to ensure that purposes are met.

### Channel 2

Channel 2 is designed to understand any disturbances between the levels, facilitate resource bargaining within and between the systems and facilitate the development of the necessary protocols.

### Channel 3

Channel 3 connects the operations at each level of subsidiarity. The implication can best be described as efficiency in the supply chain. What is required at one level of subsidiarity needs to be shaped for upward transmission to the level of the subsidiarity above. What is required from one level must be determined in consultation with the level above it.

### Channel 4

Channel 4 relates to the interpretation of the environment. If one considers the lowest operational level as the one where the actual day to day environment is encountered, there is an immediate real time linkage. However, the environment will be looked at more broadly and futuristically at this higher level within the organization. Thus, Channel 4 is alive with possibility for change.

### Channel 5

Channel 5 links the audit functions at each level, thus ensuring that the quality is assured throughout the system. It is the channel which monitors norms and values and the harmonizing of the organization with its environment.

### Channel 6

Channel 6 is referred to as the algedonic system and is designed to alert the system to any immediate threat or opportunity. It is a channel which cuts through the normal protocols of the organization as a consequence of a particular challenge.

## Integration of the VSM Model

The various components of the VSM are used to develop an overall template of an organization and the particular form that each aspect ought to take in the particular situation it operates. The important issues are:

1. That the organization maintains its viability in that it is able to exist as an independent organisation while managing its intra and inter-dependencies.
2. The various systems need to be developed and recorded as protocols on the understanding that they are under constant review.
3. Understanding the logic of, and the decision making in, the vertical channels is where energy is applied in order to maintain viability.

## Paradigmatic commensurability

It will be noted in this research that I underpin my research in Living Theory and move from SSM into VSM, using learning gained in SSM to input into VSM. However, as I have already pointed out, these methodologies are embedded in different paradigms. This is an example of multi-methodology use, which I justify through reference to Critical Systems Methodology in which Creative Holism is located and which has been designed to take this into account. The manner in which this is done is through being explicit and reconstructing the research question to fit into the new paradigmatic framework.

This issue of multi-methodology is addressed by a number of scholars. Schultz and Hatch (1996) provide an approach which recognises three possible responses to multiple paradigm use. First, they make the distinction between the ways paradigms are considered in the social sciences as opposed to Kuhn's original work, which was concerned with the change in the scientific paradigm over time as world-views changed. For them, paradigms imply a choice being made in relation to the nature of problems and the selection of an appropriate approach. Schultz and Hatch propose three approaches to multi-paradigms, incommensurability, integrationist and the third paradigm crossing with an emphasis on interplay.

This is also addressed by Pollack (2006), a fellow practitioner-researcher in the critical systems thinking track, who indicates that, "*trying to come to terms with methodologically*

*and theoretically pluralist practice*" results in *"the use of multiple theories or methodologies in a single project"*, in this case 'hard' and 'soft' paradigms (p 383). She describes the hard as being "*rationalistic, positivistic, scientific, reductionist, quantitative*" – namely functionalist (p 383) and the soft as *"hermeneutic, qualitative, phenomenological, interpretive, reflective, inductive and ethnographic"*, - namely interpretive and, to some extent, emancipatory and post-modern (p 383). She argues that positions taken with respect to paradigm commensurability need to be influenced by the organisational context and nature of the problem, rather than from a purist academic perspective.

This more pragmatic approach is followed in this research where the notion of critical pragmatism is followed. This means that knowledge constructed from a particular paradigmatic perspective cannot automatically be utilized in a seamless way in another dimension of knowledge creation where a different paradigm is utilized. Pollack (2006) argues for an understanding of similarities and differences between paradigms as devices in knowledge construction, rather than simply an emphasis on their dichotomy.

Luckett and Grossenbacher (2003) use CSM to diagnose and design an approach to reconstruct public health in KwaZulu-Natal. The context is similar to that of the FET project in that it is re-conceptualising public health in KwaZulu-Natal within a post-apartheid policy framework. They emphasise that approaches to change,

> *"assume a linear unidirectional relationship between policy-making and implementation of policy. This assumption fails to take account of: (a) the (lack of) capacity and willingness of key role players to implement policy; (b) the fact that politicians, administrators, private sector players and the public are not homogeneous groups of people sharing the same values and interests; and (c) the organisational system, within which the implementation of policy takes place, is not a closed one, but is exposed to a large variety of external influences" (p.147).*

 Thus, they draw on a Soft Systems Methodology to appreciate the contributions of the diversity of views (the interpretive paradigm) and the need for co-creating a structure in which all are accommodated, but which is robust enough to stand the assaults of different actors (the functional paradigm).

Cordoba and Farquharson (2008) have used Soft Systems methodology within the framework of CSP in their work which considers the research dimension of skills development within the South African FET sector. While they refer to applied systems thinking rather than to CSP, they use SSM critically as they "*considered it capable of accommodating a variety of perceptions*" as well as, "*learn about and act upon the cultural context in which skills development projects were being defined and implemented at the time*" (p82).

Kinloch et al., (2009) draw on Critical Systems methodology in their work on crime detection and operational planning in a UK policing context. In this case, they draw on the advances in GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and use Soft Systems to develop an understanding of what is happening in the field or the research focus, while VSM is used to design corrective action, both within self-adaptive systems. These authors point out that real life exhibits a richness, diversity and interdependence which is highly complex and multidimensional, best captured in a multi-methodological frame of reference.

Philbin (2008) uses Soft Systems methodology to inform his process model for university-industry collaboration. Kayaga (2008) uses Soft Systems methodology in relation to performance management in the Ugandan water sector, showing its usefulness when working with "hard" scientists (engineers) in areas where human learning and judgment are required. Wells (2006) provides a case study of doctors working in teams for the treatment of people with psychiatric problems. Gregory (2007) draws on VSM in the context of control and performance measurement, while Jacobs (2004) uses Soft Systems to look at performance improvement in the English Health System. Christis (2005) attempts to critique the theory of Soft Systems by indicating that the product, the Human Activity System, becomes objectified rather than being a heuristic.

These various applications of CSP indicate that it is providing an effective research framework which allows for research to reflect more of the complex diversity of organisational challenges, allowing for more situated complex research projects to be undertaken. This is in keeping with the situation in which I use Critical Systems methodology, given the complexity of the challenges in the FET sector.

## Data and Data collection

Thus begun a two and a half year conversation with this dynamic group of individuals, whose previous professional history was indicative of the history of the sector; a history I have described in Chapter 2. They came from different backgrounds, occupied different positions and had experienced the integration of the merger process. Most of them, as mid-career professionals, were balancing learning with their other responsibilities, both at work and in the home. Our conversations took place in the formal contexts provided by the programme, namely the modules, the reading of assignments, both assignments from modules I taught as well as those taught by my colleagues. Informally, we would often eat together, or have tea, and discuss what was going on in our lives. The sessions in which I was programme coordinator and the sessions of mentoring provided further opportunities. It was my practice to ensure that while the discussions were open and frank, they remained professional and any college based problems were couched without reference to particular individuals. Thus, I became privy to some of the processes that were impacting on people. These included promotion processes, re-curriculation exercises, and student and staff conflict.

At times we laughed and at other times shared our concerns about the work in which they are involved. Moreover, when I visited the various campuses where we held the mentoring sessions, the participants ensured that I met with rectors and other members of staff, as well as showing me around the facilities, especially those that were newly built, modernised or reappointed through the recapitalisation process. This process introduced me to new workshops, new classrooms, new practice centres and new friendships. However, because of student numbers and the lack of sufficient placement sites for practical work, simulation offices, kitchens, hotels etc. still need to be built.

At the end of the formal programme, I was even invited by one of the Colleges to participate as their guest lecturer at their end of year graduation ceremony, something I valued and saw as a reflection of the worth of the programme to the participants.

I was informed by individuals of some of the frustrations and problems they were experiencing and this was reflected back in terms of generic problems and situations.

Driving the long distances between the various sites gave me much time for reflection and for the framing of ideas to write down and to feed into conversations.

## Research and reflectivity

The chapters which follow are informed by the interactions and conversations between me and the participating students and their written work during the period of their studies. This was pre authorised through meetings with the Rectors of the FET Colleges when I provided an overview of the research project to them and received their formal approval to engage with their institutions.  Thereafter, in the first contact session with the students, I explained the research project to them and requested that we enter into an agreement with respect to me working with them and using their participation to provide the data for the research. We agreed that I would not personalise any data and that they would have access to my work and the right to critique it. My primary contact with the students was through my role as programme coordinator and through the two modules which I facilitated, as well as the on-going mentoring support I provided. The modules were on Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery, their first module of the course, and Managing Partnerships, offered at the end of the first year.

From my side, I agreed to provide a support service to them through offering a rotational tutorial situation between contact sessions for all the modules to assist them while at the same time being able to discuss with them the progress of my research and to provide them with the opportunity to engage with me around it.  The agreement was that I would have access to all their written work and that this would be my primary data source.  This source would be complemented by including aspects of observations on my visits to the various campuses, discussions with rectors and other staff when visiting and, as stated, their review of what I had written. During my visits and interactions I was generally interested to observe the behaviour patterns of student sand the levels of engagement that were happening in the various venues. It was interesting to observe how students interacted with lecturers and with each other, the level of organisation and care reflected in the venues, and the care taken of buildings and common areas. More specifically, I was interested in finding out how the FET Colleges interpreted and understood their core work and the amount of energy and insight that went into their endeavours of building relationships with their social partners.

This focus, however, was part of the on-going discussions with the student researchers. Thus, in these conversations, I was listening for issues that indicated thinking about relating the work of the college to the market and to broader civil society.

Arrangements were made whereby the students would cluster at rotating venues managed by the various groups, and that after each module I would allocate a day to each cluster. The clusters were made up of staff from the various campuses and, in some cases, more than one College. Thus the routine became one of Richards Bay, Vryheid, Newcastle (or Ladysmith) Pinetown and Port Shepstone. Formal discussions invariably lasted between two and four hours.

This arrangement was agreed to by the students and the other lecturing staff on the programme. It was seen as a form of mentoring to support the students in the application of their modules as they went about contextualising them into their various colleges.

## Conclusion

This chapter has expanded on the methodology that I used to inform the research question. In it I indicated how a living theory approach is consistent with systemic thinking and located living research within the conceptual framework developed by Jackson (2003), which he refers to as informing Creative Holism. I explained how living theory within the Creative Holism framework is concerned with change and improvement, rather than with regulation and the maintenance of the status quo. I also explain that it is about a particular view of the world, namely the perspective I bring as a professional, and a competency set that I utilise as an agent in a situation.

Thereafter, I explained how Creative Holism allows one to move between the paradigms accommodated by this approach, thus making it possible for me to be framing the research in living theory, while drawing on Soft Systems methodology and Viable Systems modelling to inform the research question.

# Chapter 5

# Creative Holism: Understanding the Contemporary Situation

## Introduction

This chapter provides interpretive perspectives on the participants' context by drawing on their writing and systems diagrams.  The data is provided primarily through the written work provided during the first year of their study, namely the modules on Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery and Contemporary Issues in Professional Practice. It will be seen how they have experienced the change process at their respective FET College faculties as mostly discontinuous and confusing, with few times of clarity. Participants describe changes as happening suddenly, with not enough time and certainly no adequate explanations as to why they should happen. They experience this as disruptive and suggest that management doesn't understand the pressures under which they work. Their discussions provided insight into how the separate communities of staff in the various colleges were constructing meaning for themselves, which they found hard to articulate without lapsing into anecdotal mode.

The knowledge provided integrates analysis of policy mandates with the reflections of and discussions with the students, a group of managers from 8 of the FET Colleges. The process was one of consensus building in the co-construction of a plausible collective leadership narrative which the student/participants were able to buy into.  The majority of the 25 participants were experienced in the sector, with most of them being campus managers. Some were from the head offices and included a Deputy Rector, Finance Manager, while others were from the academic and curriculum services directorates. From a gender perspective the balance was tilted slightly towards women.

The table below depicts the time-frames of the qualification delivery.

| 1st semester 2009 | 2nd semester 2009 | 3rd semester 2010 | 4th semester 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9-7 March<br><br>Orientation | 3-7 August<br><br>Leadership and Learning | 22-26 Feb<br><br>Action Research | 2-6 August<br><br>Managing Projects |
| 11-15 May<br><br>Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery | 19-23 October<br><br>Partnerships | 10 -14 May<br><br>Strategy and Organisational Dynamics | |
| 22-26 June<br><br>Contemporary Issues in Professional Practice | | | |

**Table 7 : Programme of module delivery**

In this research, I am using the written work of the students as primary data. This data has been influenced by the fact that it follows on from classroom based work which provided a context for reflective learning. A further point I need to make is that the way in which I use qualitative data in this chapter is not for quantification or norming purposes. I do not look for how many times different people are saying the same or similar things, but rather looking for different perceptions which need to be taken into account in developing a holistic perspective.

As with most discursive/written data gathered from human subjects, the subjective element is an integral dimension of it. My inference is that subjects provide perceptions and not all perceptions have been subjected to the same reflectivity as people have shared and debated their views. Moreover, the research participants, in this case, will have contributed and responded to cultures and discourses within their institutions which will mediate their learning and perceptions. While this is an interesting area of research in itself, I did not intend to individualise the data to particular colleges or campuses, but saw the group as representative of the cross-institutional embedded management discourse.

In considering what was written by students, I kept in mind what had been written about the FET sector in Chapter 2 and looked for coherence and variation as I believe it gives a more comprehensive voice to the participants in the context of their study and my research. I suggest that its validity lies in its internal consistency and its elaboration of the more conceptual descriptions in the literature.

In relation to the research question, this chapter informs the internal processes of the FET Colleges and shows them as a system with internal difficulties which divert from the functionality to which policy makers aspire.

**The form of my involvement**

First, I had the role as programme coordinator. This meant that I was responsible for the interaction with the client organisation, namely the Department of Education of the Province. This necessitated meetings with key officials who informed me of their perceptions of the need and how this could be reflected in the generic PG Dip in Leadership and Management, as offered by the Leadership Centre. This meant that in designing the overall programme, I needed to interact with my colleagues who would be teaching the various modules to explain the rationale and discuss the implications for their particular modules. Thereafter, I presented the project to the Council of FET College Rectors who gave me permission to conduct the research project.

Second, I had the role of module facilitator for the two modules entitled Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery and Managing Partnerships. By default, I also taught half of the final module entitled Project Management, where I focused on project and programme evaluation and used the PG Dip course, which the participants had been studying, as the case in focus.

Third, I took on the role of tutor, providing mentoring and support, answering queries, engaging in discussions and visiting the various clusters of students between the residential week sessions in order to discuss the implications of the modules for their practice. These tutoring sessions bore characteristics of focus groups in that they were intended not only to discuss problems associated with the content with which they had been provided, or the requirements of the assignment, but also to consider the applicability and relevance of the content in their work contexts. In driving between the tutor sites (each set of tutor sessions

took me 3-4 days and I did this six times) I had much time to think over what had been said and picked up themes and perspectives which I would test on the following group as well. Thus, when I had written about these issues, I had a repertoire of reflective knowledge to assist in interpreting and embellishing the ideas. In relation to the core work of this thesis, which was drawn from this process of engagement, I wrote a provisional paper which I shared and discussed with the participants to authenticate the recurring ideas which are recorded in this chapter.

Finally, I had the role of practitioner researcher through which I had my own (open) agenda, with its particular focus on the role of the FET Colleges in the socio-economic transformation agenda of the country through the lenses of my research defined role as "virtual consultant", as I have described.

## The customised teaching modules

The modules that I was involved in were approached as process as opposed to content. By this I mean that I taught them how to draw systems diagrams, how to construct systemic thinking and how to view knowledge from a systemic perspective.  They then utilized this process knowledge to structure their own perceptions and to appreciate the perspectives of others. This is elaborated on in Chapter 4 where the systemic approach to research is described.

### Module 1 - Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery

This first module, taught by me, was intended to engage participants with the core ideas in systems thinking and to use these core ideas to facilitate them constructing a systemic appreciation of the problems which they encounter in their own field of service delivery.  To use systems language, the intention was to see how problematical situations can be deconstructed and the various interacting dimensions identified and understood to the extent possible. Reference is made to systems archetypes (the systems dynamics in which systems dynamics are located) although, at post-graduate diploma level, this is not elaborated. What is indicated is that problematical situations display behaviours which seem to recur and become difficult to change. Simple ways of expressing this include the resistance to change, ideas and programmes which make good sense, but don't seem to

have the required impact and so on. Thus, in the first module, they were introduced to influence diagrams, multiple-cause diagrams and also to rich pictures.

In this first module, I provided an introduction to systems thinking as a means of exploring what students considered to be the key challenges they were facing in relation to providing the service they considered they ought to be providing. Systems thinking required introducing students to the diagrams that systems thinkers make use of; the basic constructs of systems thinking, namely holism and interconnectivity; the need for a focus on problematic situations requiring improvement rather than problems to be solved; the importance of perspective; and the most significant steps in the development of systems thinking as I see them, namely the move from hard systems to soft systems and then to critical systems thinking and finally to Creative Holism, as advocated by Jackson (2003).

The assignments in this module required the participants to use a basic hard or soft system approach to investigating the problematic situations they perceived. These were clearly nuanced by the role they played in the structures.

With regard to the legitimacy of the customization of the module, it was designed in accordance with a prescribed process, namely developing a systemic appreciation of service delivery problems as perceived by practitioners in whatever field they might find themselves.

## Module 2 - Contemporary Issues in Professional Practice

A similar methodology was followed in the second module, which was taught by a colleague. In this module the students had to move from considering the service delivery issues and, in awareness of the challenges, start thinking inwards to their own institutions in relation to strategies which would influence the institution in its transformation.

The assignment for this module included the mock presentation of a strategy to the particular FET Institution head in relation to improvement. The proposal was meant to be based on the holistic principles of systems thinking, namely the appreciation of context and environment, the range of influences and the complexity of multiple causes interacting.

After the completion of the first two modules, the participants were given an assignment which required them to reflect on the modules they had been taught to date. This provided insights into the manner in which participants were able to integrate their thinking.

## Module 3 - Leadership and Learning

Again, this was a module taught by a colleague, although I had insight into the content and purpose. While providing an overview of the major theoretical views of leadership, the predominant content is in the application of Theory U, an approach which is informed by learning theory and is intended to encourage reflection on learning style and process with a strong emphasis on awareness of the social conditioning in which learning is located. It is not my intention to go into any depth, save to say that the module provides an opportunity for intensive reflection on learning and identity.

## Module 4 - Partnerships

The fourth module was the second module that I taught and was in the second semester. The content was primarily focused on institutional theory and building a thorough understanding of the three dominant spheres of society, namely government, business and civil. Although many issues contained in Chapter 3 were alluded to, the main emphasis was on building an appreciation of the situated sector histories and their roles in the South African context.

By means of background, in considering the FET sector, I made the decision early on that new partnership thinking is crucial to the work of the sector. My thinking was not only partnerships, as in structured learning experiences where theoretical and experiential learning are integrated, with the theoretical taking place in an academy type context and the experiential more practical learning taking place in the workplace. For me, thinking about partnerships has progressed into a re-examination of many issues where the sectors are being compelled to work together in the redefinition of human situations and their consequent interventions. The variety of contexts is broad, as is the range of issues covered. The theoretical view I take on partnerships incorporates ideological, academic and technical perspectives. While the ideological and the academic perspectives are closely aligned as they both include interconnectedness and co-responsibility, ideologically my focus is on understanding the processes of social justice and sustainable living and academically my

focus is on critical systems thinking. The technical perspective is covered through a variety of manifestations of the project management process.

When teaching about partnerships, it is customary for me to get the participants to do an exercise on partnership as part of their learning. I make the distinction between partnership and group-work as being that different competencies are recognized and responsibilities are given out accordingly. In the exercise, the partners have to consciously work on being responsive to each other and share designated responsibilities. The project must take place over a period of time and all participants must consciously reflect on their contribution and provide feedback about their contribution to the others in the partnership. While it would be ideal for these partnership exercises to be "real", they inevitably involve role-playing, which requires different participants to "live" their role and co-construct a project. The benefit of this is an appreciation of role constructs and a critical reflection on stereotyping.

As you will have seen in Chapter 3, the theoretical literature on new partnerships is a growing one and, depending on the level at which I am offering a module and the situation of the student group, in this case the FET Colleges, I construct the conceptualization and frame the literature accordingly. In the case of this particular class-group, I constructed a reader intended to introduce participants to the ideas of the partnership society, the dynamic nature of the inter-relationships between the public, private and civil sectors, the internal dynamics of each sector, issues of power and trust, social capital and the utilization of partnerships in social and socio-economic development.

In applying partnership thinking and practice to the participants, they were required to develop an audit instrument as an in-class exercise. Then, once back at their campuses they had to individually write up case studies of partnerships they considered as "flagships". Thereafter, as a group exercise (in the local clusters), they had to utilize the audit instrument on the flagship projects they had written up.

## The perceptions of the participants

In the sections which follow, I draw on the written work of the student participants. While I number them, and know the key, the numbers do not relate directly to the table of participants provided, in order to protect their confidentiality. In the knowledge construction which follows, I use creative qualitative research as opposed to comparative

qualitative research as they use ideas in different ways. Creative qualitative research implies that the researcher draws on the ideas for inspiration and constructs them into a comprehensive whole where the meaning comes from the integrated whole and is shared with the community of the interested. It is judged on its plausibility and acknowledges the guiding ideas. Comparative qualitative research is more concerned with the recurrence of ideas and the variations of nuance they contain as well as the regularity and variety of ideas. This allows for a hierarchy of descriptive thinking which is particular to a sample population. This is a crucial distinction in qualitative research and presents a major difficulty to those who have been schooled in quantitative research, who wish to use qualitative research.

Chapter 2 provided insight into the history of the FET sector and indicated the rapid transformation programme the sector has undergone. This is supported by one of the participants who wrote,

> *"The FET sector in South Africa has seen rapid changes over the last ten years where they came from 152 technical colleges which were merged to 50 public FET Colleges. This theme was saturated in the discussions with and writings of the students. Moreover, this was a central theme in the motivation by the Department of Education for the programme. (16)*

> *"…there's a lot of uncertainty amongst staff, about the future. Management also unfortunately cannot provide any guarantees and also lack information, e.g. capped leave pay-out formulas, transfer of GEPF and medical aid benefits and new contracts are still not finalized with the new employer (college council). This in turn creates a lack of confidence to management and college council who is the employer."(16).*

This phase of uncertainty is also reflected by others. According to participant 8, the merger procedures that were implemented in the FET colleges in 2003 have resulted in low self-esteem and a decline in terms of intrinsic motivation to the staff within FET colleges. Participant 15 identified certain challenges, such as staff stability, staff absenteeism, staff compliance, student funding admin and lack of appropriate staff training. Moreover, participant 10 argued that poor public perception and lack of sector identity were among the issues that are lacking. According to participant 8 one has to remember that,

*"Colleges are at different financial position that causes comparisons between colleges and lack of confidence to the employees"*.

One of the participants mentioned that the FET sector is not given to introspection,

> *"Most of the research conducted on the sector was neither initiated nor conducted by the sector itself. The implication is that the necessary introspection and analysis of practice is missing from the sector. This is very disturbing: If we don't think about what we do and analyse and problematise it, our engagement will remain at a superficial level. A big challenge is the lack of a culture of research with the related monitoring, evaluation and review of practice."(25)*

At the time of the research participants indicated that none of them had been in their posts for more than three years. Therefore, it is not surprising that the process of change in the FET sector has been described as follows:

> *"A new identity, a new structure, recapitalization, a new curriculum, new legislation, new assessment methods and new funding and staffing norms – all this in the space of five years. The sector is a weary Atlas, holding the world on its shoulders and suffering from change fatigue" (26)*

This provides a graphic illustration of what was often expressed in the tutorial groups. Participants intended to make it known that they were being subjected to continuous change, which was stressful to interpret and implement.

Drawing on the systems process which they had experienced through the classroom facilitation, participants exhibited an awareness that FET is embedded within both the education system and business. Participants wrote:

> *"An FET College as a system is connected and interrelated to a supra-system which is the education system and is connected to other systems like industries, government departments etc. For an example education system through legislation dictates what programme FET College should offer. Each system has its own boundaries and includes various inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes geared to accomplish the overall goal of the system." (13)*

> *"FET Colleges are not separate entities, but are part of the South African economy and therefore all programmes offered must have relevance and respond to global*

*challenges. The senior management and middle management must be able to manage this kind of change and offer continuous support to staff at all levels of the organization." (24)*

This systemic appreciation is further enhanced in that there is recognition that,

> *"The output and outcomes of the system or subsystem are not always desirable. And when this happens it has an indication that something went wrong or there is a problem in the system. For instance the output of the FET system is expected to be absorbed by industry, when that does not happen, it means the output is not desirable by the industry. That leads to high rates of unemployment and other socio economic ills.", "There is also system failure which is the condition where the system does not produce desired results. This is not about blaming, but reflecting and understanding the dynamics of our systems and identifying shortfalls. Try to determine your role in the system."(15)*

This systemic nature of the system is used to describe a particular college.

> *"…my FET College as a system is made up of sub-systems which are seven campuses, finance; human resources, provisioning; student support services; curriculum; marketing; quality assurance and information management. Failure of any of these subsystems to perform will result in a college not able to meet its objectives" (13)*

> *"…it became apparent that one of the issues was the creation of the awareness that FET Colleges are a sub-system within a bigger system and they cannot function in isolation. As a sub-system FET Colleges have to respond to many variables including the political environment which determine National leadership as well as policy formation, the private sector as potential employers of students as well as communities and local municipalities where there is expectations about the roles of FET Colleges"(24)*

This section reflects the difference between what I refer to as systems change and systemic change. Systems change is the process of structural and institutional change which created the merged mega-colleges, the new curriculum and recapitalization. Systemic change refers to the impact that mandated structural and institutional change has on individuals and the way they interpret and respond to change. Thus, while systems change might be logical and

desirable, its systemic impact might produce responses expressing turbulence, overload, defensiveness and inertia rather than enthusiastic uptake.

The recognition of political interference was identified. This is seen as political influence whereby colleges are expected to respond to almost all the skills programmes for the community, many of which are not funded by the state, resulting in the institution having to offer more than it can afford to with the funds at its disposal. Most of such politically driven programmes are sustainable. Participant five made particular reference to this.

## Student performance

The curriculum changes which the FET Colleges have undergone were a subject of consternation. Essentially the programmes gravitated from the NATED framework to the NCV programme. Student performance is influenced by a number of factors, the most notable being the competency of the lecturers, with others being the quality of the materials and resources and the pervading culture of the organization. This is expressed by respondent 17 in the following manner.

> *"For example, whilst one might think low pass rate was due to the type of students the college enrols, other people perceived the high pass rate as due to the lecturers needing reskilling. Other people could perceive the problem as a discrepancy between the content of NCV and the manner in which workshops were used to enhance learning."*

A further comment provided more detail. Respondent (14), in particular, made the point that FET Colleges were meant for transformation and redress in education, but that the quality of education is poor. FET College lecturers are poorly trained and are responsible for the poor quality of education in the country. Learners are taught by lecturers some of whom are under-qualified, unqualified or have no teaching skills at all. Some lecturers are appointed on contract and they leave the job at any time. According to this participant, most of the learners admitted to the FET Colleges are drop-outs. Some of them enrol at the colleges because they failed the mainstream schools and some leave the colleges because the standard of education is not to their level. The community thinks of FET Colleges as places for drop-outs and under-achievers who cannot cope in schools.

**Students**

Students were referred to as a new breed of learners with issues relating to

> *"… delinquency, disciplinary problems, counselling, career guidance, values and attitudes. These challenges require educators now who not only focus on vocational skills, but also have to focus on counselling skills and being able to deal with the new breed of learners with various social problems of which technical colleges have never faced before." (24)*

Another participant commented that

> *"… student enrolment processes with limited amount of screening; programme based funding which puts pressure to take in as many students as possible while overlooking the quality…; Absenteeism is a problem and there is a failure to control it. Colleges also fail to provide a safe environment and healthy boarding facilities to our students and staff." We are at times unable to provide the main system with the required information, e.g. Student statistics, student debtors' reports etc."(15).*

Other issues included the lagging of infrastructure and resources; low staff morale, which culminates into poor student performance, the high dropout rates due to poor performance and the poor calibre of students who enrol in FET Colleges. According to participant 1, the high drop-out, low retention rate and poor pass rate is linked to the 3 year duration of courses and the attitude that "*someone owes me*".

**Staff issues**

In any institution dedicated to teaching, the quality and commitment of staff is paramount. The participants on the course made considerable mention of this fact and highlighted issues related to staff recruitment, retention and competency. According to participant 16,

> *"All these changes have happened drastically within a short space of time. While staff grappled about a change more and more changes came about" (16)*

One of the issues participants referred to was the new FET Act of 2006 which transferred the state employed staff to the college councils. They explained how the FET Colleges have been legislated into a semi-autonomous identity state. Lecturers who were previously on

the state payroll were required to migrate to the FET College council as the employer. This was not well received by many and resulted in a number of staff returning to school or office based positions in the Department of Education, rather than migrating.  Those who have stayed have had to go through the processes of transformation. According to one of the participants,

> *"The recapitalization programme has made immense improvements on the infrastructure, provision of resources in different campuses but little has been done in capacitating lecturers to improve their mastery of the subject content. The curriculum unit mainly focuses on moderations with more focus on assessments and paperwork than on subject specifics. This has been a trend in the DoE, introducing a new curriculum statement, taking teachers for five day workshops and expecting them to transform to OBE approach facilitators overnight. This was a total disaster and a revised curriculum statement more resembling the old one was re-introduced."(23)*

**Staff recruitment and retention**

The difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff was a recurring theme.  As respondent (15) indicated, *"Our system is failing to retain good teachers (low salaries)"*.  Reasons postulated were that there is a difficulty in finding appropriately qualified staff and that staff recruitment is too slow. Moreover, there is a shortage of skilled staff. Participant 10 indicated that the turnover from the request until a new person starts at the college can be up to 4 months. Respondent 1 pointed out that in many cases it appeared that the urgency of the request was not understood and that students were left without lecturers in the meantime. Participant 10 added that this problem was exacerbated by lecturers being employed on temporary contracts. One of the participants explained,

> *"due to the current economic climate employees who have resigned are not being replaced. This is increasing the workload and stress of staff members which in turn could increase sickness/ stress related absence" (4)*

Thus the system is seen as failing in relation to the retention of good teachers.

*" the fact that lecturers resign for greener pastures as attracted by industry with the irresistible packages and the college Council being unable to attract new staff…" (5)*

According to participant 10, salaries of staff are not seen to be competitive and participant 8 explained that this is discouraging and results in teachers lacking commitment to their jobs. A recurring theme was the transfer of staff from the government as employer to the college as employer.

**Staff competency**

A common issue expressed by the participants was the lack of appropriate staff competence. One of the participants suggested that

*"up-skilling the lecturers will enhance their competence and performance"*
*(3)*

Participant 1 noted that this is also reflected in their lack of teaching capability in integrating material from different sources which also affects their ability to interpret and present the curriculum. This is expressed by another respondent as follows,

*"…there are substantial skills gaps in terms of lecturers with the appropriate professional expertise, which leads to concerns about competence in interpreting the curriculum and dealing with internal assessment" (5).*

*"The manifestation of some of the challenges of poor academic performance, the low morale amongst staff members, poor performance, victimization of staff, corrupt tendencies, high failure rate and conflict amongst members of the academic, corporate staff and the Council need to be understood against the background  of strategic leadership and organizational development."(5)*

There was an acknowledgement of the need for teamwork.

*"I have realized that I need to work with other managers within a system so that my system will be able to work effectively." (6)*

## Staff absenteeism

The participants identified two types of absenteeism; the first being "functional", when you are present at work, but not productive, and the second being physical, when you are not at work. Participant 4 added that absenteeism is exacerbated by people who arrive late, leave early, take lengthy breaks, loiter and attend to private business during working hours. Participants also expressed unhappiness due to the poor control of absence registers and leave allocations. Managers are expected to control and manage staff attendance and leave, but when these managers do not come to work on a regular basis then accurate records cannot be maintained.  Thus,

*"Staff with good moral characters end up turning to unethical behaviour when this behaviour becomes the norm." (4)*

## Staff Motivation

Respondent (10) made the rather bold statement that,

*"education practitioners in the FET institutions have to change their mind-set and begin to perceive the challenges they face now as hurdles on the road to a better education system that will address the ills of our country; namely skills shortage, poverty, high unemployment rate, crime and diseases."* (10)

However, as respondent (15) pointed out,

*"…having sat in quite a number of management meetings and noted manager's comments, it became evident that in the midst of many possible causes of unrest, attitude is first on the list. Having initiated and chaired meetings at campus level, which are usually fruitless because of staff attitudes, it was considered important that we look at them" (attitudes) (15)*

 Staff issues were also attributed to staff moving to council posts.

*"The transfer of staff from DoE appointee to council appointee is one grey area which has caused a lot of staff to resign and pursue other fields or return to mainstream schools."* (11)

## Curriculum

When discussing the curriculum, it must be remembered that the complete frame of reference for the curriculum has been fundamentally transformed, as recorded in Chapter 2. In considering this new situation, respondent 6 envisions

*" A FET Curriculum that is integrated and holistic in its approach; prepares learners with the relevant technical knowledge and skills befitting a developmental, growing economy that is cognizant of the global competitiveness of South Africa's role in a globalised economy."*

Participant 1, however pointed out that in reality, although the content of the new curriculum is excellent, there is still a lot of uncertainty regarding its implementation and that the necessary resources are not always available. Other participants held a far more negative view. For example, respondent (6) wrote,

*"The emphasis is on dealing with systems which are linear in nature. The approach that was made with the introduction of the new NCV curriculum was a straight top-down approach considering the policy makers decisions. With this approach no consideration was made of the complexities regarding the introduction of such a sub-system."(6)*

Respondent 11 perceived the curriculum as having "gaps", while another respondent suggested,

*"To offer programs that will satisfy the need of the community to be self-employed, industries and accreditation bodies would be expensive, time consuming and requires additional personnel" (2).*

Participants were well aware of the challenges associated with implementing changes to the curriculum. According to participant 5,

*"Issues around curriculum are a great concern, despite the training provided, there is uncertainty about the professional competence of the lecturers to interpret the*

*curriculum and therefore to deliver effective teaching and assessment. Monitoring and moderation at campus level is leaning more towards the compliance than to improve the depth and standard of quality teaching and learning. The curriculum support and training seem insufficient." (5)*

The participants referred to the curriculum as being ambiguous and that there were problem with lecturers having technical and academic qualifications, but no professional teaching qualifications and that managers were resisting transformation. Management was also perceived as being complex, as indicated by one of the respondents who wrote,

*"as a campus manager, I am responsible for the implementation of legislation, internal and external departmental policies and procedures, supervision of staff and students and the maintenance of infrastructure."*
*(16)*

One of the unintended consequences of the new NCV curriculum has been the changed relationship with schools. This was explained by one of the respondents as follows:

*"The change in curriculum has changed the relationship-between our FET Colleges and the feeder schools who are now our competitors. The introduction of the new curriculum does not accommodate the out of school youth from industry" (6)*

*"The flexibility attached to the previous NATED courses is no longer available." (6)*

The participants felt that the curriculum makes demands on those who lead. Thus,

*"Campus managers should also keep abreast of the new curriculum development issues, assessment methods, quality assurance issues and policy implications. This is important for the campus to be able to offer continuous support as mentors to new staff members." (24)*

**Changing of programmes**

Participant (6) elaborated that the change to the NCV had changed the entrance requirements for students. The competition resulting from the FET Colleges drawing on

students who had grade 9 in the school system led to resentment and strained relationships between the FET Colleges and feeder schools. This was a complication that was not envisaged by the policy makers who designed the system. Participants also perceived the programmes as being difficult.

> *"The packaging of the NCV programme is not appropriate and does not match with the entry requirement of the student to the course. The lowest entry requirement in level two NCV programme is grade nine. Most of the learners in the system are either dropouts or failures in grade 12, and very few learners have achieved grade twelve. The level of the subject is very high and learners do not cope with it. These learners are too young and they have difficulty in coping and are not responsible." (6)*

Moreover,

> *"In 2007 and in 2008, the NCV results were very poor in such a way that the national average was 27% "*(6)

The market is not necessarily showing confidence in these new programmes. Respondent (10) pointed out that the NCV programmes were still being viewed with scepticism by the private sector and labelled as time consuming if they were meant to provide skills for the labour force.

There was the perception that lecturers are not ready for this new curriculum,

and that there is a lack of necessary consultation.

> *"lecturers are not properly trained and well prepared to teach the programme. Most of the qualified artisans are leaving the campus to industry, because of the salary discrepancies between the private sector and the public sector." (7)*

Moreover, participants felt that there was insufficient consultation with industry.

*"If we do not involve the industry, whom are we then training for? Our training may be invalid and may be irrelevant to industry." (7)*

**Governance and Autonomy**

Reference has been made to the new modality of governance with autonomy residing in the council. Many colleges have suffered union related disturbances because most of the lecturers had come from state provided jobs with unified conditions of service. However, most funding still comes through government through the implementation of the NCV and the associated funding model. Participants were ambivalent in relation to this change. One commented,

*" the unreadiness state of the Department of Education to give power to FET Colleges to run on its own. It causes declining condition" (8)*

While, on the other hand, another said,

*"The new FET Act leaves the college with autonomy and institutional accountability to optimize its operations through staffing practices. This affords our campuses the opportunity to respond through demand-led provisioning practices to the community and industry." (17)*

While autonomy is being implemented, funding still causes dependency.

*"Currently the Further Education and Training College sector is almost 100% dependent on government funding to procure necessary resources, infrastructure and remunerations for the human resource. This module has highlighted the importance of transforming this sector to be self-reliant and self- sufficient. Each college and eventually all campuses should be able to establish partnerships with private enterprises, civic organizations and other government departments… previously, campuses have been notorious of engaging in partnerships that mainly benefit them at the expense of their partners…hence a number of private enterprises have been reluctant to enter into these relationships with educational institutions." (3)*

This need for partnerships was reiterated by another respondent,

*"As a new manager at campus level, the programme has enabled me to realize that the College to succeed in delivering on its mandate, that is, provision of quality skills education and training with a purpose to alleviate skills shortage and unemployment: the college must be self-reliant... establish partnerships with the private sector, civic organizations and various government departments." (2)*

*"The data collected when doing research on industries, previous students and local community training needs will be used to guide the college when designing the proposed programs." (2)*

## Management

A number of management related issues were either implied or identified. Respondent (14) saw the key problems as being the slow procurement of goods, recruitment of staff taking too long, funds always being insufficient and inexperienced staff with a high turnover rate. Participant (15) noted that the collection of outstanding fees is another area where the system is failing. Participant (16) identified further issues, such as no college infrastructure maintenance programme, the strategic plan being only a paper exercise, the poor implementation of assessment and moderation policies and inefficient electronic information management systems in operation between colleges and between campuses.

The need for good management systems was recognized.

*"A quality management System was urgently needed to streamline the activities of the college via policies and procedures to ensure that the organization is progressive in response to the job market. A quality management system refers to a collection of policies, procedures, flowcharts, work instructions etc. that will guide the institution to quality service delivery (22)".*

Poor management was expressed as,

*"and then the deadlines, each manager has one aspect of the College activities to take care of, each one wants his/her work to be seen as the most important, but unfortunately on Campus level there are a whole range of activities and in spite of delegation, planning etc. it is sometimes impossible to do everything. The question*

*came up, how is it possible that people can be so short sighted, without compassion and realistic expectations? This brought me to the question, what is wrong with the communication in the College that we get our wires crossed, because at the end this is not a well-oiled machine, but a machine huffing and puffing forward, with no smooth sailing." (1)*

The need for developing management competency was recognized

*"as a campus manager, I am responsible for the implementation of legislation, internal and external departmental policies and procedures, supervision of staff and students and the maintenance of infrastructure."*
*(22)*

This includes

*"a quality management system refers to a collection of policies, procedures, flowcharts, work instructions etc. that will guide the institution to quality service delivery." (22)*

Participants noted that partnerships with industry are important. According to this participant,

*"partnerships are definitely the way to go to ensure that Colleges remain viable, but control mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure sustainability. There should be a continual cycle of engagement and feedback. Engage with the business community, ensuring accountability, sustainability and credibility and respond accordingly using innovation, strategy and service." (4)*

## Communications

Participants recognized lack of communications as a key problem area.

*"There is a lack of communication nationally, provincially and within the institution. That is evident of on delayed information sent to Colleges or insufficient supportive documents in implementation of educational regulations. Contradictory information from the Department of Education circulated to the stakeholders puts managers at risk or challenging situations" (5)*

*"there are too many managers ending up being confused as who the right person to contact first for any information or support needed. There are delays in the process and others avoiding responsibility and accountability." (5)*

**Finances**

Participant (1) claimed that the funding provided by government was insufficient, including the recapitalization needs and saw this as a problem. Participant (11) stated that the funding formula created uncertainty. It was also suggested that

*"the national budget is not enough to cater for the whole system to run smoothly, effectively and efficiently" (5)*

– the age old dilemma of limited finances and unlimited needs!

*"The recapitalization funds (R49.1 m) per college over a three year period) were mainly allocated for infrastructure development, buying of new equipment, improving communication and technology, retraining of staff and the development of the curriculum." (16)*

*" In my college managers were encouraged to enrol as many learners as possible in order to generate income for the college. At my campus we broke seams when we tripled NCV enrolment's from last year's figures." (16)*

Participant (5) suggested that the high failure rate was due to insufficient funds for purchasing relevant resources such as consumables, textbooks and equipment leaving other areas not being attended to until examinations commenced.

**Urban and Rural development**

The impact of the geographic location of the different FET Colleges, and the urban/rural nature of different campuses in the same college were raised by participants. They noted that urban colleges have a greater enrolment potential, more opportunities and do not have the same need for student accommodation.

*"Some of the college campuses are in rural areas where some of our learners have challenges that prohibit them from attending daily caused by rural under-*

*development. The majority of courses offered at these campuses are DoE program. Rural students have particular challenges and need to address issues of rural development "That can be done by the identification of the services required to meet community and social needs and then provide programs that will contribute to the provision of community services. These programmes can also be used to generate employment, strengthen infrastructure and rehabilitation of facilities such as clinics, schools, water supply improvement and upgrading of access roads....) People in rural areas should be fully trained specifically to provide solution to local employment. Most of the industries that surround us are less concerned about NQF levels in the student qualification but want to know what the student can do practically." (2)*

Unemployment is rife in rural areas. According to one of the participants,

*"Research says 92% of the Ndwedwe population is unemployed. Therefore, there is high rate of illiteracy thus poverty is the lifestyle. Most families are dependent on the old-age pensioners for food and other support they need. Young girls are giving birth to children for the sake of getting children's grant from the government."*

*"Young boys are abusing girls and alcohol to while away time and also to escape deeper issues that they are facing"...*

*"These students we have in our colleges are a product from the lost communities. They are a material from broken families, single and abused parents and they are frustrated from all angles of their lives, rejected and excluded by the education system of the day. They need a proper guidance as to how they could perform beyond their negative life experiences." (9)*

## Leadership

It was suggested that there is a need for management to be committed to modelling new values and behaviours, inculcating psychological ownership to the transformation process through involvement in shaping the institution, assigning responsibilities and developing structural mechanisms to support learning, innovations and renewing the culture of the organization (3).

Participant 16 recognized the role of building partnerships,

> *"Each college needs a partnership broker with specific skills and knowledge to carry the college vision. However, partnerships have many challenges. These include the global economic downturn, the sustainability risk inherent in partnerships, government policy and involvement, time consuming and questionable benefits, power abuses."*

## Partnerships

The data on partnerships was substantially developed through the students' development of their audit instruments. In these instruments they targeted the following issues

**The first group of instruments was about technical issues:**

1. The name(s) of the organizations partnering the FET College
2. The nature of the business in which the partnering organization is operating
3. The commencement date of the partnership
4. The end date of the partnership
5. The details of the contact person
6. The form of documentation for the partnership agreement
7. The resources utilized by the partnership
8. The payment schedule
9. The review schedule

**The second group was descriptive:**

1. The objectives of the partnerships
2. A brief description of the partnership

**The third group was strategic**

1. The marketing and advocacy of the partnership
2. The benefits of the partnership to the FET College
3. The sustainability and institutional capacity development of the partnership

**The fourth was evaluative**

1. Monitoring and evaluation

One will immediately note that the bulk of the partnerships were of a technical nature in that they are tied to a client-supplier frame of reference. New partnerships would be indicated by more substantive explanations and reflect on-going conversations.

## Partnerships in existence

The participants provided information regarding some of the partnerships in which their College was involved.

## International Partnerships

*Filton College*: This is a partnership where Filton College in the UK utilized British Council Funding to send students to the FET colleges. The aim of the programme was to increase capacity in South Africa to develop student centred, but employer focused programmes, while the UK colleagues learnt to integrate their thinking and practices in new contexts.

*Royal Denmark Embassy*: This is a partnership to transfer and train in Danish technology for low cost modular housing development. This was a technology transfer project.

*Department of Education and DANIDA (Danish Aid)*:  The purpose of this partnership was to build capacity in the FET College itself through coaching and teaching of staff. It was a capacity development programme for FET College staff and provided partial funding for the project being described in this thesis.

*The Individual Learning Solution*: This project provided business site support for the training and support of learners in the IT industry.

*The Atlas Partnership Project*: This was a student swap programme that aimed to increase international understanding involving students from the FET College and students from Sweden.

*The Departments of Agriculture, Environment Affairs and Rural Development*: These were partnerships to train particular students identified by the relevant departments.

## SETA partnerships

*Sports Academy* : This was a partnership to develop sports officers for communities

*Zakhe Baynesfield Training Centre*: This partnership was designed so that a FET College could provide additional teaching resources in the field of Agriculture as well as access to relevant equipment. This includes the facilitation of assessments.

*AGRISETA*: A partnership to teach Horticulture

**Government Partnerships**

*The Department of Economic Development and Tourism*: This partnership was designed in order to provide training to cooperatives funded by the Department.

*The Department of Economic Development and Tourism*: The World Cup made it possible to take up opportunities for training in hospitality, food and catering, pollution and the environment, travel and tourism, Information and Communication Technology, carpentry, plumbing, electrical, vehicle maintenance, welding, clothing and textiles and agriculture.

*The Department of Community Safety and Liaison*: This partnership was designed to facilitate competency in computer literacy and financial management amongst the police force.

*The Moses Khetani Institute*: This partnership provided free facilities for an internship programme in Information and Communication Technology

*The Ugu Municipality*: This was a partnership to train local unemployed men as builders

**Partnerships with businesses**

These are partnerships whereby customised training was provided by the College, but was paid for by the business entity.

*DEFY*: A partnership with DEFY in order to provide a learnership through the MERSETA

*DORMAC/WILBAT*: A partnership with MERSETA accreditation for boiler maker and welding apprentices.

**Special learners**

*Fulton College for the Deaf*: This partnership was intended to build the FET College capacity in facilitating learning for deaf learners. Fulton School has vast experience in working with deaf learners and so the FET College brought them in on a voluntary basis to facilitate

inclusive education within the College so that hearing impaired learners could be taught employment skills.

## Conclusion

In my virtual consultant role I was able to identify what I consider to be prototypic learning processes that need to be considered by all FET Colleges. If circumstance allowed another roll-out of the programme, I would not change the methodology I used, but these prototypic learning processes would inform any new readings provided. The methodology required the participants to examine their own environment and surface their own challenges. Thus, by providing the readings, I would not be prescriptive in providing packaged challenges, but would hopefully sharpen their insights.

This chapter provided a rich description of the participants' experiences in the FET Colleges. It substantiates the literature referred to in Chapter 2, which indicated some of the difficulties which have been perceived by leading researchers in the sector. The participants elaborated on the waves of change that have tumbled over the FET Colleges in recent years (2005-2010 in particular) and have identified the array of issues relating to staff, students, the curriculum and programme change, governance and management, the urban/rural divide and the challenges of leadership.

What is required is consideration on what can be done to move towards improving the situation. In the chapter which follows, some aspects of Soft Systems Methodology will be applied in the development of propositions to inform this.

In concluding, I refer back to the systemic diagram provided in Chapter 2.

| INPUTS | PROCESSES | OUTPUTS | FEEDBACK |
|---|---|---|---|
| | External processes (2)<br><br>• Policy initiatives<br>• Financial incentives<br>• Learnership model<br>• Stakeholder relationships | | |
| Input factors: (1)<br><br>• Existing skills base<br>• Funding<br>• Awareness of future | | Output factors (3)<br><br>• Existing vacancy base | Messages coming back about value ascribed to |

| | The FET Processes | • Location of opportunities<br>• Access to business generation platforms | outputs and outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Urban/rural bias<br>• Accessibility<br>• Transport<br>• Accommodation<br>• Peace and security<br>• Equity and redress (gender, race disability)<br>• Attitudinal and reputational perspectives | | | |
| | (4)Internal processes<br><br>• Institutional processes<br>• Professional processes<br>• Student welfare<br>• Knowledge management<br>• Sustainable models | | |

**Table 8 : Systemic Linkages**

It will be seen from the text that a number of issues impact on the ideal systemic flow.

**In relation to input factors:**

1. Unemployment is very high, especially youth employment. This has a negative impact on student attitudes

2. Useful data to use for planning is hard to come by and is disorganised

**In relation to internal processes:**

1. There are deep staff related issues in relation to recruitment, selection and retention

2. The curriculum is overloaded with the NCV programmes, which are experiencing their own difficulties due to the level at which they are offered and the poor results coming out of the FET Colleges

**In relation to external processes:**

1. There is a sense of a high degree of change leading to innovation overload.

**In relation to outputs and outcomes:**

1. Pass-rates are poor

2. Absorption into the market is low

All of these are indicative of a sector that is in need of improving its responsivity to the need for improving employability and extending employment. It is a very simple argument to make that FET Colleges need to build stakeholder relationships in order to confront the challenges.

The nature of the content provided in the dialogue, diagrams, written assignments and tutorial conversations provided a rich picture of the contemporary situation in the FET colleges, evidence to me that the methodology and content I was using for teaching were having the desired impact. This is evident in the openness and ability of the student participants to vocalise their understanding and systemic understanding of the problems besetting the FET Colleges. The overwhelming conclusion that I had to come to was that given these internal organisational realities, the capacity of the FET Colleges to engage more substantively in new partnership thinking was premature and that they needed to work towards transforming their inner capacities in order develop their responsive capability and move towards engaging with the new partnerships agenda

# Chapter 6

## Recommendations for Change Initiatives

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a set of theoretical propositions to put to the FET Colleges as recommendations for the transformation of their inner processes in order develop their responsive capability and move towards engaging with the new partnerships agenda. I have developed a position on responsivity which has come about as a consequence of studying the literature on the sector, contextualizing it through engaging with the cadre of participants on the post-graduate diploma and drawing on the literature of partnerships. It will be noted that some of the proposed root definitions speak to technical issues, some to professional issues, but that all rely heavily on the use of inter-relational and communication skills.

The methodological system I have used to develop these recommendations intended for informing implementation by the FET managers in their role as internal change agents is drawn from SSM and takes the form of root definitions, from which the FET Colleges would need to develop their own contextual Human Activity Systems.

This chapter is informed by the experience of participants in the FET Colleges expressed in their assignment writing, especially their rich pictures, and conversations to clarify issues in mentoring contexts and reflects their experiences of the change processes they have undergone. In needs to be seen in the light of the research process which I have described as Creative Holism.

These issues were reflected on in Chapter 2 and provided insight into the contemporary policy framework which formed a background to the contemporary situation at the time when the SSM investigation took place (i.e. the time when the research was done.)

As SSM was the methodology I used, this phase involved the development of theoretical models built out of the perceived problematic issues embedded in the perspectives perceived from the situation. In systems language, this took the form of identifying root definitions which would form the basis of conceptual models.

Root definitions are presented as the core of systemic solutions which, in the eyes of the consultant, in this case virtual consultant, can be built in consultation with the client into plausible Human Activity Systems and then enacted. My involvement with the participants was structured through our pedagogic relationship and so I taught them the SSM process so that they could take this forward in their own contexts in their own time, should they so desire.

Thus, I have developed a number of root definitions in response to the holistic picture I developed out of our interactions. I have provided an exposition of each through drawing on the SSM mnemonic of CATWOE, as described in Chapter 4, as well as a rationale for each root definition.

In concluding this introduction, I quote from one of the students,

> *"When one looks at this as a soft system, we can immediately pick up a lot of unhappiness among the staff which is caused by a variety of factors some of which are mentioned below. The attitude is very negative and there is a lot of conflict among the staff. A large number of staff is leaving the college employment compared to the number of staff that the college is employing. Our core business is to teach and learn and if we do not have a person in front of our students, our system is failing. The shortage of skilled facilitators as the college seems to compete with industries offering a much better package than the FETC." (11)*

## Recommendations for root definitions

In Soft Systems Methodology, the first phase is one of developing insights into the situation perceived as problematical. This was done in the previous chapter, mainly through reference to the writing and diagrams of the students. My argument throughout has been that if the FET Colleges are to meet the proximal conditions of efficiency and effectiveness within a context of social justice, then their responsivity is a key component of their organizational capability. Responsivity raises the following three questions:

- What it is you are responding to?
- What competencies do you need to be responsive?
- How you are building your responsive capability?

The previous chapter gave a clear indication of the challenges experienced by the student participants. In this chapter, the focus moves to the responses needed to approach these challenges and embed the competencies required to enact new partnerships.

**Recommendation 1:    A data management system that provides accurate information about the skills market**

A major challenge facing the FET Colleges is how to address the critical skills problem in South Africa. The assumption being made at this stage is that the individual FET Colleges can respond to this challenge. ***The first recommendation, therefore, is that each FET College needs to design and develop a system for strategic alignment with other players in Human Resource Development by means of effective knowledge management in order to market and manage the throughput of students in accordance with market and community needs.*** In considering this recommendation, one is responding to the paucity of accurate information the FET Colleges have regarding the skills needs of their constituency. It implies the need to develop a quality data management system which aligns to other data systems. The FET Colleges will have to have the necessary hardware, software and personnel to manage such a system.

In order to expand on this statement I draw on the SSM heuristic referred to as CATWOE. CATWOE is intended to check root definitions on which conceptual modelling can be based. Moreover, the literature on SSM also recommends three analyses, namely the technical, the social and the political. The implication is that what might sound feasible from a technical perspective might be impractical as a consequence of social perspectives or unlikely as a result of political issues.

The **C** refers to customers or beneficiaries; the **A** to the actors, those people who would need to be involved to ensure that the intervention happens; the **T** describes the transformation that takes place which is best described through clarifying what must change; the **W**, for world-view, is intended to draw out the conditions in the thinking of people that make it feasible for the change to happen; the **O** refers to the system owners, those whose permission needs to be sought and whose support is essential for success; and the **E** refers to the environmental factors (namely external factors) that will influence the

system being built. This frame of reference will be utilized in each of the recommendations, but not in a technical deconstructed manner.

The envisaged system will take the form of an interactive data management system which will be reflective of the boundaries set by the institution. These boundaries will be in the first instance geographic (i.e. within the coverage area of a specific FET College or specialist FET College, i.e. one FET College providing a specialism that would be uneconomic or impractical to run on more than one campus).

This data system would need to draw on a number of actors. The first would be the SETAs, because they are the guardians of the skills development process in the country. They have records of all the workplace skills plans, which include the anticipated skills requirements of all institutions registered as employee bodies. This information can be disaggregated to provide local information which indicates potential skills needs and can be supplemented through the individual FET College having a functioning liaison system with as many local employees as possible. It is assumed that this data set would be inclusive of all employee bodies including government and civil society organisations.

It would be important for the liaison function to interact especially with the Local Economic Development officers situated in the various localities. They should have knowledge of the job creation potential and opportunities in their municipal area. These opportunities would in all likelihood not be recorded by the SETA's. Moreover, the data base would need to be interfaced with as many other data-bases as possible, which would provide useful information.

Such a data set assumes the ability of various actors to do what policy intends them to do. The transaction required is one whereby such a data base is put in place in individual colleges. If college staff members are serious about its implementation, it will put pressure on the SETAs and other institutional bodies to get their acts together and appreciate the importance of such data.

I know of no institutional body that would deliberately seek to prevent this from happening as it is embedded in existing policy frameworks. What it would require, however, is significant improvement in the electronic environment and the management of data.

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However, the FET Colleges are directly influenced by economic growth and economic realities. Recessionary pressures inevitably lead to less job opportunities which heighten discouragement. Thus, the internal process of developing the data system could meet with inertia because of a lack of a perceived need for labour information at a time of high unemployment because of the perceived lack of opportunities for work. However, in reality, such a situation requires a smarter process of aligning those aspects of the labour market where opportunities do exist, and targeting them specifically.

In my view, the logic of this data system is obvious and is closely aligned to the whole purpose of the SETA movement. Therefore, logic is not the stumbling block. The problem might be a technical one, of data management. However, information technology is highly innovative and can be accessed, albeit at a cost.

One therefore has to give careful consideration to the social and political factors that might influence this technical solution. For example, one has to take into account that unemployment is a structural issue in South Africa. Youth unemployment is particularly high and one wonders whether this leads to a competitive or an apathetic environment for the youth as they think about their job prospects. Youth unemployment has political connotations, especially in the context of the demographic realities of South Africa. I do not believe, however, that this negates the principle of ensuring that those who are recruited into the FET College should not be considered holistically, that training is for a job, and the more clarity on the envisaged job opportunity, the more likelihood of success.

This system directly informs the core work of the FET institutions, namely the training of students. It is a system designed primarily for students and secondly for their sponsors, who ensure that they learn in appropriately resourced facilities as efficiently and effectively as possible, incorporating theory, simulated practice and workplace internship. It will be a system which includes scoping, planning, teaching, assessment and certification in an integrated manner. The transformation will be the competence and commitment of professional staff working within well-structured and integrated programmes and greater interconnectivity with the organisations for which training is designed. Philbin (2008 p498) refers to this as *"enhanced organisational connectivity"*.

**Recommendation 2:     A system of market aligned qualifications through a highly enabling curriculum**

The second recommendation is closely linked to the first. It is no good aligning to the market if you do not have the products the market requires. In this case, ***what is required is a comprehensive range of programmes in relation to levels and subject areas to ensure that the skills needs in the community are met as efficiently and effectively as possible***. The transformation is one of ensuring a repertoire of programmes, as required, rather than offering programmes simply because of the need to capitalise on revenue streams. Such a repertoire of programmes will need assessors and moderators to complement the lecturers who offer the courses. Thus, the recommendation is that FET Colleges must align their programme offerings to the requirements of the communities they serve. The competencies required in the development of curricula are not trivial. Even when programmes are described by SAQA, turning the framework into productive learning is no easy task. Thus, it is incumbent on lecturers in FET colleges to develop competencies in teaching and learning that facilitate their understanding of the curriculum in its construction and application. This needs to be seen as a core professional competency which requires specialized curriculum management competency at managerial level.  Curriculum management for the FET sector cannot be seen in isolation to curriculum being developed and implemented at general and Higher Education levels. This includes the very real need for close collaboration between LET schools and FET Colleges. It was my understanding in the earlier policy debates on education within the ANC and reflected in government policy documents that the national qualification framework would work towards an exit examination at the end of grade nine, before entry into further education. The emphasis was then to be placed on qualifications with a vocational bent so that even those going on into Higher Education would have a better career orientation. However, for reasons both social and political, it seems that this routing has fallen out of favour, which can be attributed to the historic negative perceptions of the FET sector and to the attractiveness of pursuing an academic curriculum with the intention of moving on to Higher Education as a dominant aspiration.

Whatever the reasons, there is still strong political will to strengthen the FET sector as it is still perceived to be the sector that is most likely to assist in the creation of meaningful jobs. However, how are we going to create the necessary political will for a powerful leadership

message of what the FET Colleges are able, willing and seen to be doing in the promotion of decent jobs for all, as is the current political slogan? This is an essential element in the change process. From a soft systems perspective, the transformation will fail without an enabling worldview in which the transformation is located. Worldviews are a reflection of deeply embedded attitudes including expectations. Thus, in a culture where we are aware of structural unemployment and where we measure two types of unemployment, those who are work seekers, and those who have given up on seeking, urgent attention needs to be given to providing powerful evidence that the national system of education is working with social partners to address this situation. The FET Colleges, in particular, need to become seen as highly influential agencies in promoting a dignified citizenry through empowering people, and youth in particular, for participation in the economy.

The alignment with the General Education Band has particular relevance to the streaming of post grade 9 learners into the technical, commercial, electronic and service industry opportunities for which the FET Colleges are intended.

The alignment with Higher Education is more complex. It incorporates both articulation streams that facilitate the movement from the FET band and the qualifications offered in the FET Colleges (level 4 to 5), as well as the exploration of the FET Colleges developing community college status and providing level 5 courses on their own campuses in partnership with Universities. It also involves linking the FET Colleges into research partnerships, where technology application and transfer will be required to be supported at intermediate level. The transformations, therefore, concern articulation and viable interconnections.

### Recommendation 3:    A system to stabilize staff through recruitment, retention and development

Recurring themes raised by the participants were the problems associated with staff, and these included recruitment, suitability, competency and attrition. These deeply rooted problems were exacerbated by mergers, the new curriculum and changes in the conditions of service, especially due to the autonomy and transfer of staff to the council platform, as well as the movement of staff between the teaching profession and the plying of their trades in the open market. This really lends itself to be considered a problematical area or

"mess" as there are no ready solutions, especially one based on simple causality. The simple question is, *How can the FET Colleges become an employer of choice?*

It is not easy to designate one beneficiary or customer to this question from the CATWOE framework. The reason is simple as there are a number of beneficiaries. The most compelling one must be the students themselves, whose studies are disrupted and undermined by constant changes of staff, especially when many of the staff members have the technical qualifications, but not the professional qualifications. However, the benefit also accrues to the FET institutions as it builds their institutional capacity and makes better staff interrelationships a distinct possibility.

The actors in such a system would be a range of people ranging from those identifying the staff needs (i. e. programme managers), the marketing staff/agency or the Human Resource practitioners responsible for the selection process. Consideration has to be given to process improvement in these areas. It would also be advisable to hold comprehensive exit interviews to ensure that reasons for staff leaving are clear and documented rather than simply assumed.  Moreover, is there an effective system in place for development needs and staff appraisal in order to manage the process of staff growth and development?

The envisaged transformation is not an easy one. It is a transformation by means of improved processes for recruitment and development that systematically reduces high staff turn-over and raises the quality of staff work. Such a change will be negated by disrespectful processes of recruitment and cursory treatment of staff, as well as by the attractiveness of offers from other organisations. Further, the problem might lie with the difficulty associated with the initial training and development of FET college lecturers, who are expected to have both technical and professional qualifications. Can the problem not be shifted to Higher Education and the need for a special qualification routing for FET College employees? Such training would incorporate the integration of technical skills alongside teaching competency.

**Recommendation 4:    A system to maintain appropriate linkages between professional staff and the trades**

System 4 is closely aligned to system 3 above, but has sufficient distinctiveness to be considered separately. As has been pointed out above, this linkage to the trades is particularly important in this sector with its emphasis on intermediary skills and balance

between hands on competencies and theoretical knowledge. Staff members need to remain engaged with their fellow practitioners in the field as they are a resource for practice teaching and for communities of practice where new techniques, materials and tools, machinery and technologies are being practiced. Thus, the cross-over of knowledge is important, whether coming from the college or from practitioners.

It is in the light of this that I recommend a system *to build an integrated staff platform by means of the promotion of communities of practice whereby, instead of simply recruiting, the FET colleges also actively promote interaction between the trades and industries through short placements and job swaps, and through participating in promoting the trades and extending the learning opportunities of those involved in work*. The beneficiaries of the system would, in the first instance, be the FET Colleges, through better mutual understanding between the staff members and their fellow practitioners in the trades and industries. This could lead to greater flexibility for part time staff from the trades and industries assisting with teaching and building awareness of the importance of the teaching role. This process would need to be coupled with the creation of a positive staff climate, which, I am well aware, is much easier to advocate for than to actually realize.

The building of these interrelationships is strategic and intended to build confidence in the system. However, the worldview that is embedded in its success is the acceptance that a satisfied work-force has many components. There are internal elements where clarity around conditions of employment, job security, promotion prospects and pathways, authentic training and respect are of importance. External elements are mainly about the attractiveness of opportunities in the market.

The system envisaged will need to enjoy the support of staff at all levels and will imply the dedicated time of staff members.

This is a systemic strategy which implies a strong partnership component. It would form a linkage which would be of benefit to the FET staff in that it would facilitate practical experience and good case study development opportunities, while providing those in the trades and industries with opportunities to engage with those who have a more academic understanding of the work being undertaken.

As with all partnerships, the benefits would have to be balanced against the risks. Thus, the benefit of improving learning would have to be balanced with the time taken in the application of the strategy.

**Recommendation 5:    A system for ensuring sufficient equipped workshops and other specialised training facilities**

This fifth system follows logically from the one above.  It is essentially a system ***to maximize the training facilities which exist in the FET colleges and the institutions where facilities operate both as working operational premises and as training facilities***. Both the industry and the FET College need sufficient workshop space for teaching and production. It makes sense for there to be a location based inventory of available equipment and enabling arrangements to facilitate both learning and production. In particular, where industry has needs for facilities, and they have sufficient time to integrate learning, this makes good sense for scarce resource usage.

 The customers will be the FET lecturing staff who will have access to the various facilities on campus, and inclusive partners' training facilities. Reciprocity will involve inclusive partners also having access to FET facilities for their own in-house training. This task will need to be undertaken by brokering and programme management staff in order to determine access and coordinate the use of facilities, taking into account the repertoire of competencies to be taught and the prevailing regulations governing the use of particular facilities from a health and safety perspective. Thus, there will be a transformation from a range of disintegrated and opaque training facilities into an integrated and transparent system of coordinated facilities, which will lead to an understanding and appreciation of the greater benefit to all stakeholders. However, this integration of resources will be dependent on all those who have access to resources being convinced that their own needs are being met through participation in the integrated network. Obviously this sharing will be constrained by logistical issue such as distances to be travelled, capacity of venues etc.

A further sophistication of this linkage would be where a group of employees, e.g. a cluster working in a particular locality, might club together with an FET College which might then be able to leverage specialized equipment that could be used by all.

**Recommendation 6:    A system to build positive community perceptions**

One of the greatest challenges of the FET sector is the community perception that FET Colleges provide inferior opportunities than those offered in the academic sector. This is an unfortunate heritage consideration drawing on the perception that the less academically able go into more practical learning. When one looks at high unemployment, there is a strong argument to be made that FET skills are easier to utilize in creating jobs and finding work. These views need to be juxtaposed to enhance the FET college reputation. Thus, the customers of this system are the potential customers of the FET Colleges, namely organisations and potential students. The actors would include all employees in the FET College sector; the political leadership; and the existing users of the system, who individually and collectively are responsible for the effectiveness, efficiency, efficacy and ethicality of the system. The transformation required is *a perception shift from one that perceives the FET Colleges as providing for low profile skills to one where, through advanced learning and teaching practices, FET Colleges are perceived as providing highly efficient access into work and opportunity.* This transformation only becomes meaningful when we recognise the critical need for economic growth and employment and recognise the importance of intermediate skills development.

Reputational management is a difficult process. Reputations take a long time to build and can be lost very easily. For an institution to be recognized as reliable and efficient takes time and effort and leadership that is both strong and yet socially aware and sensitive to transformation. Reputation improvement cannot be mandated, but requires consistent dedication.  Many of the issues of trust building discussed in relation to partnerships are pertinent.

A system to provide aspirant students with all the advice and information they require to make informed and committed decisions concerning their training and the linked workplace opportunities would be a strategy in this transformation. The transformation would be that such a system would be strategically aligned to system 1, and co-owned by the various stakeholders, who would work cooperatively with the human agents allocated to this system, thus emphasising a proactive propositional marketing style. The programmes on offer will be sufficiently differentiated so as to maximise entry and exit points. This system

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would be one in which marketing would be proactive and develop propositions to take to various potential partners, clients and customer groups.

Many of the issues of reputation directly influence student recruitment as the socio economic concerns of students are considerable. These range from issues of student finance, through to academic support and housing. Of particular significance are issues relating to health and gender, including gender based stereotyping and associated behaviour.

**Recommendation 7:    A system to integrate deeply rooted social concerns into FET College provision**

This is a system that needs to take into account the students' social needs and concerns. It is a system which needs to identify all of the problematical areas of student participation in the FET College system. While ideally, it would be a system which provides solutions to student problems; this is a very substantial task. Students' social concerns include funding for studies and living expenses while studying, accommodation while studying and care for siblings and parents while studying. This is exacerbated by the social characteristics of the time where health and well-being are key issues.

To compound this, the high level of unemployment influences student attitudes. There is a perception by many that they are being trained for unemployment. This level of discouragement impacts negatively on the FET College culture.

Thus, this system is one that *facilitates student well-being through linkages to a variety of specialist institutions and organisations dealing with specific social issues of relevance to students*. These relate to issues of health, well-being, social welfare, etc. The transformation will be one which changes student confusion to one in which they are better informed and thus able to draw on the welfare services that will be of benefit to them during their studies. This will require the student support services to develop a comprehensive network of support providers. This transformation requires a worldview which is deeply concerned about the youth of South Africa and their prospects for the future and which recognizes the variety of factors which are leading to youth disillusionment at this time.

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**Recommendation 8:    A system to promote responsivity through partnerships**

It is the dominant argument of this thesis that the building of responsivity through partnerships is a powerful integrative mechanism for facilitating improvement. My further consideration of this theme would be premised on the fact that all of the above eight proposed systems would, to a greater or a lesser extent, be incorporated into such a system. Thus the proposed system would have the following characteristics.

As far as the beneficiaries of this system, the primary beneficiaries have to be the students passing through the FET Colleges. The nature of the benefit would be one whereby they would be able to enrol in a programme where there was a structured pathway though which they could have a high expectation of placement in the workforce, conditional on their successful completion of their studies. While the students would be the primary beneficiaries, there would also be secondary beneficiaries. The FET College staff would benefit in that a culture of commitment and productivity would be more likely if students felt that there was purpose to their studies and that there was the likelihood of a decent job when they had achieved their qualifications. Employee bodies would be more confident that the FET Colleges were providing them with the requisite manpower. The credibility of the SETAs would be enhanced as they would be seen to be providing efficient and effective input into the FET Colleges.

The actors in this system would be a coalition of players drawn from the various participating organisations, namely the employer bodies, the labour data management organisations, the SETAs, relevant government bodies and the FET Colleges themselves. In order to build commitment to such a body, there would have to be a clear sense of realization that the problem of job creation, and the role of the FET Colleges in it, is compelling, and that together they co-construct a domain in which the fuller consequences of FET College failure are clearly understood by all, and the systemic benefits of a more aligned and qualitatively improving workforce through quality training  are understood to be to the advantage of all, organisations and citizens alike.

The transformation would be from a poorly aligned, under-performing FET sector, which has a poor data management process of workforce preparation, to one which is aligned, consistently improving and drawing on efficient data management. To be fair, this is the

intent of policy. The transformation mechanism, however, is the missing dimension, which is efficient partnership brokering capacity. This brokering process needs to be developed as a strategic intent, an organizational competency, and have the necessary personnel agency to enact. The purpose will be for the FET College to build and maintain self-initiated dynamic relationships with other organisations and individuals in order to fulfil their purpose.

The next aspect to consider is the worldview. We have to ask what kind of worldview is required for the envisaged institutional configuration to occur. Here, the literature is again of assistance. We require a profound understanding of the potential of the sectors as can be gained from an appreciation of writers such as Waddell (2005). However, we also need to consider the work of writers such as Utting and Zammit (2006), who emphasise the exploitation that can happen in the name of partnerships. The social history of the sectors in South Africa and the existing configurations of relationships between business, labour, government and civil society, as well as the lack of bridging leadership, all feed into a dominant worldview characterized by a profusion of counteracting opinions. This thesis contends that this worldview has to be countered at different levels. One of these levels is the individual FET College; another is the FET college programme staff. Another proposed level, which will be expanded on in the next chapter, is the proposal for a coordinating body for FET work, which can expedite national voice on FET issues and promote processes to start the slow work of trust building.

Unfortunately, this process can be undermined by different players through their ownership of a piece of the action. Therefore, careful consideration has to be given to vested interest and how it can be accommodated in a context where the core principles of partnership building are not violated.

The environment in which the above system needs to be located is an unenviable one. It is an environment which has a local and a global context. From a local context, unemployment in South Africa is at an all-time high and demographics indicate that the youth are severely impacted by the nature of existing employment factors. From a global perspective, the downturn in virtually all the economies of the world at the time referred to in this dissertation has resulted in a situation where unemployment is a severe international problem. We can either throw up our hands in despair or we can work at solutions. An

underperforming FET sector is not part of the solution nor is an FET sector that might have policy on its side, but is out of kilter with policy aspirations and time-frames.

Therefore, this thesis proposes an initiative growing out of the FET Colleges themselves through processes of internal transformation.

## Conclusion

This chapter, in the spirit and practice of Creative Holism, proposed a dominant systemic methodological frame of reference, namely Soft Systems Methodology and has drawn on two of its core constructs, namely root definitions and human Activity Systems, to inform proposals for improvement. The final proposal is an integrative one and embodies the dominant quest of this thesis, which is to consider the theoretical and practical application of a responsive partnership mind-set and protocols for engagement. In the spirit of virtual consultant, I will present these proposals to the FET College managers for their consideration once the thesis is complete.

# Chapter 7

# Designing for the Future – a Perspective Using VSM

## Introduction

In this last chapter, a number of recommendations have been made which inform the requirements for the FET colleges to build a base for authentic responsivity. This chapter provides a theoretical design framework for incorporating these recommendations into a model appropriate for viable responsivity and is based on the body of theoretical work referred to as Viable Systems Modelling. This, therefore, moves attention from the supplementary issues in the first phase of Creative Holism, which focused on responsivity, to a designing phase, which focuses on the preconditions for the development of responsivity. This chapter, thus, brings to the fore the second section of the implementation phase, the first having addressed the recommendations in Chapter 6. The product is a section of Viability perspectives on responsivity and partnerships and is based on Viable Systems Methodology. VSM is usually associated with (i) the diagnosis of existing organisations to understand problem areas that need intervention or (ii) the design of new organisations, neither of which being entirely appropriate to what I am doing. I am suggesting a reformulation which, while acknowledging many of the problems that exist in the FET Colleges and the sector, rather brings a transformation mind-set to the question. This implies a design template for consideration alongside existing practice by comparing the concepts embedded in the VSM with current practice.

The data on which this chapter is based consists of the evidence already discussed concerning the turbulence in the FET Colleges as they come to terms with their immediate history and their strategic orientation in finding their purpose. Thus, the source of data is drawn substantively from the participants' interpretations of contextual reality, as drawn from their written assignments and discussions in relation to various customised modules that were part of their post-graduate diploma. These modules were Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery (which I taught), Contemporary Issues in Professional Practice, (which I did not teach, but which drew substantively on Contemporary Issues in Service Delivery) and Managing Partnerships (which I taught).

In this chapter, I propose three viable recursive levels. The concept of viability has been explained in Chapter 4, but will now be directly related to the FET Colleges. In this chapter, I will refer to the FET College as the system, level 1, with particular programmes based on partnership principles within the system being seen as recursive level -1, and a proposed national FET college hub being presented as recursive level +1. It must be borne in mind that during the process of this research, the FET Colleges were moved from the Department of Education to the newly established Ministry of Further and Higher Education. The implication of this was that the FET Colleges were moved from being a responsibility of the provincial department of education to being a responsibility of the newly formed national ministry. Thus, I am proposing a national "HUB" which could take various forms. To my way of thinking, this would best be done by a semi-autonomous body with governance shared by government, business and civil society.

The purpose of level 1 is for the FET College, in its strategy and operations, to have the necessary organisational capacity and linkage mechanisms to facilitate responsivity through comprehensive partnerships with business, government and civil society.

The purpose of level -1 is for operational groupings within the FET Colleges to be constituted and capacitated in order for them to utilize partnerships as a key part of the way they go about providing their service

The purpose of level +1 is to create an organisation which is able to work at provincial level to engage with the institutions with which the FET Colleges need to partner at their spatial level, and to identify and engage with organisations and communities that might be marginalised or excluded. The purpose will be to have insight into the areas of competency of each FET College, to have relevant and reliable information about the feeder communities and organisations in the province, to align the work of the colleges with the relevant SETAs and generally to provide a comprehensive support system for the colleges. This will include conducting research on issues such as viability of the business models, scope of activities, opportunities for training and awareness of training needs within the FET Colleges, as well as within the organisations the FET Colleges are intended to support. Its major strengths will be supportive in providing wide networking at the appropriate policy making levels, research into business needs and forecasts into future needs. The emphasis

must be in terms of the principles of facilitating viability; that is to ensure that the FET Colleges have the necessary support for them to operate in terms of good cybernetic principles.

In considering each of these levels I will explore the concepts of cybernetics, subsidiarity, requisite variety and recursion. I will further inform this through reference to the four systems. I will integrate this through considering the connective channels between the recursive levels which provide the living communication and linkage mechanisms between them.

## Cybernetics

This is the founding principle of VSM. The principle is that any functioning body, be it mechanical or human, requires control mechanisms. For example, for a gun to fire it needs a trigger mechanism; for a tree to grow it must have photosynthesis; for an air-conditioner to work, it needs a thermostat; for a human to live it needs inbuilt autonomous systems that regulate body functions. VSM makes the assumption that human learning is such an autonomous system. We self-regulate to our environment through responses that occur at different levels of consciousness and experience. Thus, VSM is based on the theory that human learning is inevitable for survival. It then builds on this in relation to human organisations and indicates that if human organisations do not adapt to changing environments, they will not survive. Where there is confusion in human organisations about how communication and control work, and if these are not embedded and accepted, the organization will work autonomously and create a response that could differ significantly with the intention of the managers. This field of thinking is taken up in systems dynamics, which indicated different autonomous responses as archetypes. I have already referred to these processes as complex adaptive.

The implication for the FET Colleges is that the communication and control processes can either be effectively managed in accordance with organizational purpose, or autonomous archetypal behaviour will occur, which, in all likelihood, will be in conflict with institutional intentions. The lesson for management is to understand this process through drawing on Viable Systems Theory. This is a theory which provides insight into how to go about building learning into the organization in accordance with what has emerged through research into

viability in organisations. Viability refers to the ability to self-manage in complex environments. Senge (1990) has referred to this as the Learning Organisation.

## Subsidiarity

For ease of reference I am going to assume that the 9 FET Colleges in KZN can be referred to as A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and I. Moreover, I will not make reference to a particular FET College, but will refer to a letter, which could be any one of the existing Colleges. The programmes in the Colleges will be assigned lower case letters, a, b, c, d, e. (While I locate this HUB in relation to the nine FET Colleges, with the change to the FET Colleges now being seen as a national competency, this model would fit the larger context).

Thus, I make reference to the HUB (+1), the FET College (1) and the programmes (-1).

The essential issue of subsidiarity is that decision making must be made as close as possible to the client and other stakeholders of relevance. Policy must be framed in such a way that people can make decisions with as little bureaucratic inertia as possible. Thus (A) must be able to function as a viable institution with reliance on its own council and management structure, without having to refer to the HUB for decision making, unless the decision is so out of variance that institutional decisions might have ramifications which could have systemic implications that would directly impact on "B" or "C". Where this is the case, those decisions need to be made at the HUB.

Thus, the HUB would be directly engaging with the SETA bodies, the NQF, and a broad range of government and business bodies and would ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of all the programmes that are on offer. The HUB would present itself as a coordinating body working to broker understanding in order to inform as cohesive a body of knowledge and programme frameworks as possible. This knowledge would be available for "A" to develop a comprehensive profile of the environment in which it is operating.

Thus, "A" would focus on shaping its capacity and capabilities to meet the local environment. Programme "a"[10] would be a sub-component, but would need to be directly

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[10] I refer to programmes rather than Campuses. Campuses need not be autonomous in relation to programmes as programmes might be presented at more than one campus and it might be more feasible for them to be College competencies.

involved in understanding the clients and stakeholders that directly influence its marketing, enrolment targets recruitment and placements.

The most import issue in subsidiarity is that those closest to the decision making context feel empowered and competent to make decisions within enabling policy frameworks.

**Requisite Variety**

Requisite variety refers to the fact that in order for any organism to survive it must have greater capacity within itself to adapt than the environment presents as challenges. For this adaptive process to occur in any organization developed by humans, the implication is that for an organization to survive and thrive it must be in a dynamic relationship with its environment and, therefore, in order to do so requires management. The two core processes of management are (i) conceptually shaping or configuring the environment and (ii) building its organizing capacity to meet the needs of the environment it has conceptually configured.

In practice, this means that at each level of subsidiarity there must be a match between what the environment wants and what the organization can offer.  This is a highly complex process and I provide an illustration from the health service. If a country has a balance of 1 qualified medical doctor for each 100 members of the population, you can configure your health system accordingly. Such a low ratio would imply the possibility of a high degree of specialization, fairly easy access to medical attention, and a likely high degree of specialist expertise. What is implied in this situation is that there are affordability mechanisms in place and that there is a high degree of complexity in the medical system. If on the other hand you had one medical doctor to 10,000 members of the population, you would interpret the environment very differently and have to configure the medical system accordingly. You would probably, as in South Africa, need to develop a primary, secondary and tertiary health system with far more reliance on primary health care workers. The important issue is that there are factors that influence the way one categorises the environment and the way one manages a system to interact with that environment.

Thus, at each level of subsidiarity, the institution must have an alignment interpretation that is feasible and practicable.

In South Africa, we have segregated the labour market into different professional, technical and vocational directions through the establishment of the SETAs. This is a form of managing the variety of careers on offer. In order to meet this configuration, we have developed the qualifications framework which provides a perceived, manageable option which we service, in the first instance, by providing unit standards and learning programmes for all employment options within that sector.

My recommendation, built into this organizational design, is that the HUB be responsible for the management of requisite variety through integrating the various components which go into managing requisite variety as a national competence. This would imply that the HUB has a close working relationship with the SETAs and with SAQA in order for every FET College to be able to draw down the knowledge they need to work within a harmonized understanding of the labour market. It would also facilitate the alignment between the FET Colleges in order to inform them of the best way to work in relation to other FET Colleges in their selection of particular centres of excellence.

At the FET College level, the task would be to disaggregate the national knowledge base and reinterpret its own requisite variety. We know, however, of the constraints that each FET College currently faces and, therefore, a contingency would be the capacity constraints, which become a very urgent matter to address. I would recommend that this be a matter of referral to the HUB, which could make the necessary arrangements with some universities to develop the required professionals to fill these gaps as soon as possible.

A very significant issue of relevance to requisite variety is to acknowledge that at present, our FET College sector in KwaZulu-Natal is exhibiting clear signs of non-viability. I refer to the fact that there is a severe lack of fit between what the FET Colleges are offering and what the market requires. This has a number of causes, but the most significant, I think, is the high level of unemployment, and especially youth unemployment. Urgent attention needs to be given, from the perspective of interpretation of the environment including unemployment and the current offerings of the FET Colleges, to create a better variety fit. This is a deeply embedded problem within South African society and requires a leadership mind-set which can move beyond the antagonisms of the present.

**Recursion**

Recursion essentially refers to the hierarchical alignment of parts within the whole. Recursion always needs to be qualified as a concept to distinguish it from bureaucratic power relationships. In the purist systemic sense, it is rather about the level of utilization of the appropriate resources in order to meet the requisite variety which exists in the environment. Recursion, also, always needs to be considered from a complexity perspective. When you look at it from simple systems experiencing connectivity thus creating more complex systems, the concept of emergence becomes applicable. The interconnectivity of the simpler elements creates something which is bigger that the collection of the sub-systems. Thus, a car is far more than a heap of components. The interconnectivity through design is an emergent act brought about by human and technical agency. Thus, recursion takes into account subsidiarity and requisite variety and necessitates the hierarchical interplay between the operational levels in order for environmental variety to be managed.

Recursion can also refer to institutional culture. If the agent at the coal-face, the lecturer in the classroom, understands something of the principles of variety management, recursion and subsidiarity, it is far more likely that that individual will have more trust in the system – will understand that it is not based on the vagaries of particular individuals, but will have an intrinsic logic.

The table below illustrates levels of recursion and indicates initiation points for the subsidiarity that is needed to be articulated at these various levels.

|  | Role | Enabling energies, mechanisms and channels |
|---|---|---|
| **FET "HUB"** | Promote and manage, at national level, a platform for intermediate skills building to be on the national agenda and to articulate it, with elegance, to generate emergent, synergistic energies. | Leadership energy focused on articulating skills development as a national priority and as essential national culture and character, with ethical integrity, and deliberately adding to a national narrative. |
| **College** | Provide facilitative leadership in the | Leadership energy focused on ensuring internal and |

| | communities served by the College in order to promote and extend a forum of stakeholders to explore, in broad detail, as well as in institutional detail, coherent synergistic efforts to realize employability skills development. | external stakeholder mechanisms and which take into account all realities but focusing priority goals in an integrative framework with all institutions committing to their part within a continuous dialogical learning community. |
|---|---|---|
| **Programme** | Articulate outputs and outcomes which embed the expectations embedded in the college as described above. | Linking programmes to the staff needs of particular organizations and initiatives and ensuring curriculum is informed by international practice and local context |
| **Individual** | Existing as a free agent, in which is articulated a professional identity which critically engages with the above levels in the articulation of trust in the system and a motivation for personal motivation and commitment. | Taking independent ownership for learning and articulating learning into practice as living theory within SCV. |

**Table 9 : Levels of recursion**

## Recursion and subsidiarity in the pursuit of effective FET

### The five systems

The five systems referred to in VSM are the systems of purpose, co-ordination, audit, information, and knowledge management and strategy. These are seen as the five essential systems which need to be coherent and effective at each level of recursion. In this case, it means at the level of the individual FET College (1), the national FET HUB (+1) and the programme (-1). Because of subsidiarity and requisite variety, each of these systems will be different because they are working at a different level of systemic hierarchy, but they will be aligned in that they will make coherent the relationship between the various levels.

In considering these systems and the logical interconnectivity between them in order to display the principles above, the literature refers to the channels of communication and control.

**System 1: Purpose**

In drawing on the above in relation to cybernetics, requisite variety, subsidiarity and recursion, each recursive level and each institutional component needs to identify and articulate its purpose. While it is usually considered as disaggregating the organization into its operational units, this raises an issue of selection because in many instances, a focus on functions as units might be more appropriate. Thus, in the case of the FET Colleges, while their spatial configuration is important to their operation, so are the various functions and services required to operate at each campus level. This is a problem for all disaggregated institutions (in relation to their locality) and highlights locality vs. functionality. This is probably one of the most critical dimensions in VSM application.

A purpose statement for an organization or organizational component is not a statement of vision, but a statement that clearly articulates what that unit does. Thus, a purpose statement for College "A" (recursion 1) would be something like:

"The purpose of this public college is, in the geographic area designated to our operation, to offer a range of appropriate programmes of relevance to the included communities, and by means of which we can effectively and efficiently build partnerships to close gaps between the requirements of the labour market and the labour pool and underpin this with the promotion a responsive enterprise culture."

Recursion -1 for College "A" would be the purpose statement for a particular programme. Thus it could read as:

"The purpose of this programme in building construction is to identify the labour needs in the communities in relation to the building construction industry, and recruit appropriate students to be trained in this field, in partnership with the employment organisations, in order to provide a likely flow of work-placed graduates from our programmes"

Again this is hypothetical, but illustrates the virtual consultant role I am playing. The process of constructing such purpose statements is in many ways as important as the statement itself.

Recursion +1 would refer to the HUB and could read along the lines of

"The purpose of the HUB is to network and interrelate between relevant organisations in order to provide accessible knowledge to each of the FET Colleges and their stakeholders, as and when required, which is built on comprehensive, clean and up to date authoritative data, presented in a format which meets the data requirements of the various FET Colleges."

## System 2: Co-ordination

There are nine FET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal and 50 in the RSA. Clearly they are not carbon copies of each other, but each reflects the particular nuances of their situation. These nuances will include the demographics of the area, the natural resources, the industrial development, the community land holdings, the small towns and the cities. In the case of the FET Colleges, their particular profile needs to be informed by the economic geography of the catchment area.

A major reason for considering system 2 is to ensure that resource allocation is aligned to contextually related purposes. Thus, one needs to consider the proximate localities of FET College "A" in relation to "B", "C" and "D" and so on.

This second system presents the appreciation that units, while they can independently function and operate, are dependent on other systems to sustain them. Thus, any one unit is only really viable in the context of its systemic location and connectivity within a larger organizational environment. Coordination implies the need for the various independent units to be viewed collectively and for them to compete for the resources available to them. Thus, coordination implies resource bargaining, and reason and logic about institutional scope at the organisational unit level.

At the FET College level (1), coordination will be between the various programmes and their competing resource demands, both human and physical. Thus, coordination at this level will determine what programmes ought to be run in terms of the identified market demand. Coordination will also consider the various stakeholder groups and the resources that can be applied for in relation to the strategic importance of the requirements. Coordination will also take place between FET Colleges to look for economies of scale in relation to programmes that are not viable for particular FET Colleges to offer

At the programme level (-1), coordination will be more about ensuring alignment in intake, throughput and placement and in the coordination of the components of the programme. This will include coordination of the theoretical components, the workplace based placements and practical field experience.

At the HUB level (+1), coordination becomes far more complex and layered. There needs to be facilitation of inter-college arrangements in order to promote inter-college collaboration. There will also need to be coordination between the employability and training needs identified by the various SETAs and the teaching resources available at the various FET Colleges. There will also be an opportunity for coordination through analysing the opportunities indicated through areas where attempts are being made to apply the opportunities identified by the Department of Trade and Industry and its subsidiary organisations, most notably the Industrial Development Corporation.

**System 3: Audit**

The audit system determines norms, standards, benchmarks and score-cards, which assist the organization to determine targets and standards and measure progress against these. It allows for variance to be identified and the causes thereof to be identified and remediated. The targets and standards need to be standardized and not merely internally set. This provides for credibility and a quest for improvement rather than the lowering of standards.

For (1), I suggest that the targets and standards have a number of dimensions to them. The most important is the degree of alignment between recruitment and placement. The next in importance are the standards achieved in terms of the quality of student results. A third important audit would relate to staff development and the attainment of professional development targets.

These targets will in turn feed into and provide evidence for the development in responsivity and the building of quality partnerships.

The programme level (-1) audit will focus predominantly on the levels of satisfaction of the various partner organisations in relation to the students provided to replenish and extend the workforce. The audit function will also need to focus on the progress made by individual students to ensure that they are achieving the required standards. Programmes frame

particular qualifications in terms of fields of knowledge. In the first instance programmes are indicated as skills programmes, which imply that they are described in relation to unit standards which have been developed to describe the competencies which are to be achieved for certification. Where a detailed and comprehensive knowledge base is required, as indicated by a vocation, the programme framework is more complex and is defined in terms of a number of modules with both vertical and horizontal curriculum logic. This is then referred to as a programme, with the word programme here having a distinctive technical meaning. Where a programme has a comprehensive practical dimension which requires formal accredited workplace learning, the concept of learnership has been formulated in the South African Qualifications Framework. Learnerships imply not only accredited workplace learning, but also a theoretical programme framework leading to a qualification.

In the FET Colleges, learnerships are intended to replace the long standing system referred to as NATED. The NATED framework provides for a distinctive period of theoretical learning followed by actual workplace experience which, when a relevant time has been served, caps the qualification for awarding.

Where programmes are not linked via the SETA's and the Department of Labour, but rather through the Department of Education, the National Curriculum Vocational refers. This curriculum is designed for vocational learning and acknowledges the importance of practical application. However, the lack of capacity in the workplace for placements is acknowledged and therefore the FET institutions, as part of their recapitalization project, are required to build facilities for the application of practice. This includes workshops, office centres, accommodation and hospitality suites etc.

For the HUB, (+1), the audit process will need to focus on a number of issues. This will include the evaluation of the data received from the SETAs, which has been aggregated from the array of workplace skills audits and skills development plans. This data will need to be checked for its reliability. Other audit issues include measuring against the National Qualifications Framework, which provides a hierarchical curriculum informing conceptualization in the form of NQF levels. The levels inform a hierarchical understanding of knowledge construction and of logical competencies that can be associated with human

cognitive development. Additionally the standards are embedded in the various Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which differentiates between economic, vocational and industrial fields and thus knowledge fields in terms of their application in the economy will need to be considered.

The HUB will also need to monitor the knowledge draw-down requirements of the various FET Colleges and invite feedback on the usefulness of the knowledge provided. In turn, the HUB will need to ensure that the FET Colleges make best use of the knowledge provided.

## System 4: Development

The development system, generally speaking, refers to the processes of environmental interpretation for the purposes of exploring the variety offered and thereafter developing models to incorporate the variety and innovation required. Thus, new ways of engaging with learning needs and innovations appropriate to the FET band is the substance of development. Restraints on development at the local level are the consequence of the FET Colleges being part of a national competence regulated by education and labour policy.

At the particular FET College level (1), development is predominantly about adding local value to programmes through exploring the particular competitive advantages of the environment which are likely to influence local job opportunities of significance. The development process identifies possibilities and opportunities to be explored for their potential viability.

At the programme level (-1), development will be about considering the various options for growth and development which are within the realm of possibility for the FET College.

At the HUB level (+1), the development focus is predominantly on the evolving nature of work and the workplace. This would necessitate considerable interaction with the national Department of Trade and Industry and its subsidiary organisations. The DTI, through the Industrial Development Corporation, has identified a repertoire of opportunities for the South African economy. This opportunity profile will need to be analysed in relation to the training that needs to be embedded in it. Moreover, in the contemporary South African situation, the development function will need to be stimulated and energized to find

innovative and creative alternatives to confront the overwhelming unemployment situation, especially in relation to the youth.

## System 5: Policy and decision making

The development function will invariably generate a greater variety of possibilities than the resources base can accommodate. Thus, system 5 operates as the highest level of decision making at a particular level of organizational recursion. Decisions made at this level will of necessity be strategic, taken to optimize the desired future of the organization, balancing risk and benefit, cost effectiveness, variety of offerings and so on.

The highest policy making body within the FET College level (1) is the College Council. This body needs to exercise its leadership capacity in order to ensure that not only is good governance imperative, but a deep sense of viable sustainability needs to be cultured. The council will therefore determine, in consultation with management, the strategic direction that the FET College is to take. The council and management will also align the various policies and standards which will be embedded in the FET College.

At programme level, policy decisions will focus on the creation of programme offerings, timetables and placements. Policy relating to the best ways to develop curriculum and teaching methodology will also be developed.

At the HUB level (+1), national policy for the FET Colleges will be determined. Because the FET Colleges are autonomous in that they have councils, without national policy directives, unnecessary confusion on matters of staff conditions of service, programme standards and so on would be experienced. Therefore the HUB would need to play a predominant role in policy making.

## Communication and control channels for the 5 systems

### Channel 1

Channel 1 connects all the levels through connecting system 1 at each level. This is intended to ensure that the purpose of each subsidiary level makes sense when interpreted by the level above and the level below. Thus, while the purposes of each level will be different,

they will be complementary and coherent. These purposes will facilitate management by creating the necessary management regulations to ensure that purposes are met.

*Communication and control channels for system 1*

When one sets out the purposes in this hierarchical way, the knowledge requirements at each level become fairly obvious and thus the knowledge management system required can be built and refined. Communication would be enhanced if the purpose statements were made transparent through an electronic portal system.

In will be noted that in considering system 1 critically, especially as it relates to a strategic assessment  for design/redesign, it is necessary to not simply identify the way the primary units exist and are structured at present and to accept this uncritically as the best way for determining viability. The particular organizational history has most certainly influenced the configuration. However, the question to ask is, "if we were designing an organization to…," what would the best configuration be?"

Within the VSM paradigm, the individual agent will appreciate the need to cooperate with others to create operational teams which appreciate the distinctive contributions made by each member and the need to enhance team efforts through co-creating systems for their coordination, audit, development and decision making. It is here that participatory decision making, taking into account horizontal as well as vertical integration, becomes the knowledge energy of the organization.

## Channel 2

Channel 2 is designed to understand any disturbances between the levels and to facilitate resource bargaining within and between the systems and facilitate the development of the necessary protocols. This is an area which looks like an important line of enquiry and needs to be seriously considered as the FET Colleges move from being a provincial to a national competency.

## Channel 3

Channel 3 connects the operations at each level of subsidiarity. The implication can best be described as efficiency in the supply chain. What is required at one level of subsidiarity

needs to be shaped for upward transmission to the level of subsidiarity above. What is required from one level must be determined in consultation with the level above it.

**Channel 4**

Channel 4 relates to the interpretation of the environment at each level. This directly influences programme development as the FET Colleges come to grips with the training requirements. Channel 4 needs to focus on the crucial environmental issue of youth unemployment which is influencing student attitudes and poses a major threat for the future unless turn-around strategies can be devised in job creation.

**Channel 5**

It has been pointed out that channel 5 links the audit functions at each level, thus ensuring that the quality is assured throughout the system. It is the channel which monitors norms and values and the harmonizing of the organization with its environment. I would suggest that this is an area that needs further investigation.

**Channel 6**

Channel 6 has been referred to as the algedonic system which is designed to alert the system to any immediate threat or opportunity and it is the channel which cuts through the normal protocols of the organization as a consequence of a particular challenge.

At the time this research was conducted, there were a number of crises that arose, one of which concerned the transfer of staff from the provincial government to the council platform in relation to their employing body. This is an illustration of channel 6, as it disrupts the system entirely and contingency plans have to be considered.

## Partnership as strategy for viability

If the FET Colleges are to improve their contribution to decent work creation and thus contribute to building the South African economy and society, their viability has to be a focus of attention. The argument has been made that trusting and collaborative relationships among the key stakeholders are essential to inform change in policy and practice. For policy to become living and enabling it needs to become public and broadly

owned, rather than in some legal sense, be implemented. This is a stark reality which has to be confronted. We need to build and leadership must be bridging for partnerships to thrive.

New partnerships can and will only come to fruition when there is a deep acknowledgement that organisations separately can only deal with pieces of the problem. If we are to build a state that is developmental, the emergent belief of people, based on evidence, must be that the sectors of society dealing with the development and improvement of employability skills are indeed considering the big picture together. This big picture must focus on business retention and development, as well as new business development. It cannot be business as usual, but must be inclusive enterprise development rather than the narrower agendas of individual business profitability at any cost or merely vote winning discourse from government. Of course this is difficult and seems unattainable. However, we have to consider the alternative of the sectors deepening the divides between them at the cost of societal value.

Societal Value Creation through partnerships implies the need for a reflexive and dynamic social contract. The parties to this contract will need to be drawn from the three dominant sectors in society, nuanced to the particular realities of South Africa.

We have already identified the dilemmas inherent in South African society. While we have the tri-partheid alliance, we are well aware that our society is nevertheless conflict ridden with conflict lines evident between the state and its workers (pay disputes, strike action etc.), its citizens (lack of service delivery protests), the private sector and labour, and government and the private sector vs. civil society. The implication is that the nature of interaction leads to a dominant culture of conflict and its resolution.  A partnership culture is built on the premise that despite difference, the potential offered through cooperation and the building of mutual appreciation will reap a more productive harvest. This is the basis of the partnership paradigm.

Within the partnership framework, a new systemic model of Societal Value Creation becomes possible. Ideally, this will lead to a context where the value propositions of each sector will be appreciated in the interests of holistic community development. Thus, business, for example, will appreciate government's position in relation to decent work for

all and employment led development. This leads to the possibility of buy-in to a broad based social aspiration for competitive holistic development.

In this project, we have worked from the assumption that the FET College needs to play a brokering and managing role in partnerships. This is not to say that other sectors cannot be initiators and brokers, but logic implies that if the FET Colleges are to play a partnership role they are well positioned for that role to be a facilitative one. This logic is based on the premise that the FET Colleges exist for the promotion and articulation of learning as a key factor in vocational advancement.

By implication, the mind-set of the FET College must be one which views other organizations not merely as clients for whom they provide services, but as potential collaborators in social value generation. The alternative is a fractured, supply led FET sector propped up by government funding.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Viable Systems Modelling is able to contribute to informing the research questions by providing the modelling components to construct an institutional framework for the critical consideration of managers within the system. It is a model which structures the problem of alignment between what the FET Colleges are offering and what the labour market requires. However, in so doing, it reveals the profound problem of participation in the economy presented by the very high unemployment exhibited in South Africa. Components of the model also show up the potential lack of alignment between the individual FET Colleges, and between the programmes offered in each FET College respectively. However, the responsive capability of the FET institutions is most hindered at the macro-level where the coordination and flow of knowledge concerning the knowledge of the market and the development of appropriate programmes to meet the market is lacking. The model also provides for FET College managers to review their own institutions in relation to the five core systems. I have attempted to locate new partnerships as a key strategy in managing the alignment issue.

Finally, I return to the underpinning theory of living theory and the compelling value driving my practice has the refrain of how to build an inclusive and socially just society. Thus, I

promote partnerships as a means of informing and realizing this strategy and embedding it in organizational change.

# Chapter 8

## Summarising Learning and Moving Forward

### Introduction

This thesis has focused on a number of interwoven questions. The background one is how the FET Colleges can use responsive new partnerships to contribute to lowering South Africa's high unemployment rate and thus enhance the quality of life.  The particular words in the above sentence which are extracted as the core of the thesis are the words; "use responsive partnerships".

In this thesis, I have assumed that the problem of social partnerships to achieve the outcome described, namely FET Colleges using new partnerships as the vehicle to achieve lowering unemployment and enhancing the quality of life, is reflective of a deep problematical social situation. Thus, I have approached the problematical situation with what I consider to be an appropriate methodology, namely, Creative Holism. This methodology has been described and applied through its location in systems thinking, phases of creativity, implementation and refection.

I have approached the research from the perspective of living theory because, for me, living theory provides me with what I consider to be the most authentic manner in engaging with my own work. I have elaborated on this and built my justification through an interpretation of the UKZN Charter. In my living theory, for a number of reasons, I have found systems thinking to be the most helpful methodology to use in working with new partnerships, which is an emerging philosophical and political phenomenon which, at this stage for me, provides an epistemology for considering a new way of thinking about complex and interrelated problematical situations such as the one engaged with in this thesis. Moreover, I have situated living theory into the framework of Creative Holism, thus integrating my theoretical positioning. Before considering some of the key issues embedded in this thesis narrative with the theme of how the FET Colleges might use responsive partnerships to contribute to lowering South Africa's high unemployment rate and thus enhance the quality of life, I wish to reflect on the use of living theory in this thesis.

Living theory is a process of action research with an intense focus on personal learning aligned to values and perspective. While I had a deep desire to use the project to influence the thinking of individuals, namely the participants, I underestimated the shift from thinking of practitioner educators and practitioner managers. Managers are expected to work, to a greater extent, at institutional issues. The research clearly revealed institutional difficulties. Without individuals within the institution, and at different levels, finding each other and working collaboratively, institutional change will remain opaque and intimidating. Thus, I moved to the emphasis on Viable Systems Methodology, which allows for individuals at different levels to engage in an institution's wide process. The danger of this is that it is easy to unconsciously move into a more mechanistic mode of thinking, rather than constantly using and reinforcing consciousness and awareness as foundational to deep transformation.

 I return to the issues embedded in the thesis. The logic of this question is that the quality of life in the country will be incrementally improved as unemployment goes down and that the FET Colleges can contribute to this if, as a core strategy, they develop partnerships based on the principle of responsivity.

The question does not imply a uni-causal relationship, meaning that if FET Colleges are responsive through partnerships, then unemployment will go down. The question is posed as a systemic question, assuming that there are many influences and that multi-causality is implied. For example, job creation is easier when the international economy is in a growth phase, thus creating demand for goods from South Africa. We also know that the FET sector draws mainly from learners coming out of the General Education sector and that is there is a dearth of students with Mathematics and Science, and that if these subjects are vital for particular qualifications, a bottleneck is created. The question does, however, imply that if the FET Colleges were to develop a strategy where they tackled head on the question of supply and demand in the labour market, with creativity brought about through quality new partnerships, then their positive input into this muli-causal system would be greater.

Another assumption that needs to be engaged with is that FET Colleges can create jobs. This is clearly a fallacy. FET Colleges can only provide design learning experiences where skills-training is paramount. However, if there are components of business and industry where they are being restrained from development because of a lack of appropriately qualified

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work seekers, this becomes a structural problem and an impediment to business development and therefore to job creation as well.

The proposition which is embedded in this thesis is that if responsivity is interpreted as having a particular set of components, then this responsivity can be a driver for growth, with a multiplier effect in government, business and civil society.

The issue of quality of life also needs consideration. Quality of life is also multi-causal. However, education is a key growth input. As people become more educated, they can engage more in dialogues in which they can make choices. They will work off a more informed base and thus exercise more power in relation to the decisions which impact on their lives. The social milieu with its built in biases will contribute significantly to the way opportunities are shaped and valued. This was brought to the fore in the contributions from the lecturers in their recognition of the urban bias in the work done in the FET Colleges. What did not come up was any reflection of gender bias in the FET Colleges, which I consider to be anomalous. Certainly with the students I worked with, there was no evidence of gender bias and while I believe that this could well be the case within the societies served by the FET Colleges, it does not reflect the realities of the population data. I would therefore suggest that further work on potential gender bias in the sector should be carried out.

My response to the need for new partnerships as a key competency of the FET sector remains resolute, although I do not believe this is going to be easy or quick. There is no solution to such a deeply embedded systemic problem. However, and drawing from the Systems Thinking tradition, there is no excuse to let a vicious cycle develop where the situation gets worse. Rather, we must look and use our systemic intelligence to identify leverage points for change to improve the situation. Each improvement will bring its own challenges, but the path of on-going improvement establishes a trend which influences human commitment. The challenge, however, is a leadership one. To this end the FET managers were treated as emergent senior leaders in the FET sector and time will tell how effective the project has been. For me, a real sign of success in future years will be when the fundamental living theory questions I posed at the beginning, namely

- "How can I, as an individual, be fully true to self and add value to my society in the context in which I am situated through a greater appreciation of new partnerships?"

- "How can I, as an agent within an organisation in which I interact collectively and systemically with other agents add value to our society through greater appreciation of, and expertise in, social partnerships?"

- "How can I, as a leader in the sector in which I work, enable this sector to add value to the good of the nation through developing my capacity as a connective leader? Moreover, how can this practice be owned and articulated by the participants in their on-going practice?"

It remains a challenge for this framework of enquiry into consciousness and the deliberate construction of competency and organisational learning to become manifest.

## Learning from the project in which this thesis is embedded

This final chapter brings together the learning for the project. I start by considering the main question, namely, "*How can the FET Colleges use responsive partnerships to contribute to lowering South Africa's high unemployment rate and thus enhance the quality of life*". I then consider the first sub-question namely *"How can I, as an academic practitioner[11], engage with Further Education and Training College practicing managers during a formal qualification in order to inform organisational responsivity to engage with new partnerships in the sector, with the intention to enhance the quality of life of their students?"* It will be remembered that I nuanced this question by posing three subsidiary questions of my virtual client group, namely

- "How can I as an individual be fully true to self and add value to my society in the context in which I am situated through a greater appreciation of new partnerships?"

- How can I as an agent within an organisation I interact, collectively and systemically, with other agents add value to our society through greater appreciation of, and expertise in, social partnerships?"

- How can I as a leader in the sector in which I work enable this sector to add value to the good of the nation through developing my capacity as a connective leader?"[12]

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[11] I have described my role as " a virtual consultant"

[12] In the initial presentation of the thesis the external examiner focused on these three questions as integral to understanding its merit.

While these questions were and remain important to me, and did provide me with a frame of reference for my engagement with the student practitioners, I cannot, in all honesty, say that these questions where high in the discourses I encountered in the sector, which are reflected in chapters 5 and 6 in particular. For this reason, my pursuit of Creative Holism assisted me in developing a framework for future consideration by means of Viable Systems Modelling. For me, this validates the use of Creative Holism as a methodology as it allows the flexibility to engage creatively with the dynamics of the situation in which one becomes embedded and use this as a basis for forward thinking and future action.

I do not believe my research invalidates my research questions. For me personally, the questions remain core to my own living theory, which I have also explored. While I still believe that there is good theoretical evidence to support the potential usefulness of new partnerships in transformation agendas, there is no evidence that they are easy. Rather, the theory emphasises the importance of changing mind-sets to accept this kind of thinking, and how difficult this is in particular organisational cultures. In the case of the FET colleges, the discourse encountered is indicative of institutional environments experiencing a range of internal problems relating to staff recruitment, retention, capacity, competency motivation, or sufficient student commitment, and an environment where there is insufficient structured or organic relationships to engage effectively in new partnership building. Chapter 2, with its emphasis on the pre and post 1994 history of the FET College, or rather the sectors out of which they emerged, gives a clear indication of the personal constructs of meaning in the minds of many people, especially the close alignment between apartheid, education and labour policy, job reservation and manual labour. The new vision for the sector as providing the bulk of our vocationally orientated education and training at the intermediate sector has not yet been caught, except in small pockets represented by some projects which were revealed in the audit of partnerships undertaken by the student participants.

This does not negate the validity of new partnerships, which incorporate a far more aligned and integrated set of relationships between the FET Colleges, the SETAs, government departments, employers and community groups. Again, this is anticipated through the recommendation of following a reconstruction exercise by means of Viable Systems Modelling as a next phase in the organisational development of the FET Colleges.

A further issue that becomes clear from this research is that there needs to be a deep concern relating to the staffing of the FET sector. The narrative which emerged was one of a sector in which staff stability is influencing the functionality and identity of the FET Colleges. I remain convinced that the curriculum presented to this group had an impact on their sense of professional identity and appreciation of the systemic nature of the problems facing the sector. This was reflected in their insights from the use of systemic approaches and methodologies they were expected to use in their course assignments.

## The narrative approach

I have attempted to construct a narrative as a process of sense making concerning the recent history of the FET system. I have described how the participants have found the process of change discontinuous and often threatening. By constructing this narrative we have together, namely me as a collaborator, and them as "practitioner managers/students" created a system of meaning to apply to the experience. While the narrative assists in sequencing events and in providing logic; it masks the covert stresses and strains of the individuals who have been embedded in it.

However, it does indicate that a reconstructive logic among participants is a partially enabling device in sense-making and facilitating and, to some extent, the strengthening of professional identity. It has, hopefully, also added to a growing awareness of the importance of developing a strong personal presence in one's own professional development and engagement, thus building capacity as an active subject, rather than a passive victim of circumstance.

As one with a dominant interest in the mechanisms that FET institutions use as they build their responsive capacity, the above narrative has been a salutatory learning experience as the practitioner managers/students have shared their professional lives with me.

## Framing living theory for pedagogic input

Finally I return to the three sub-questions which I presented as a framework for living-theory construction, namely;

- For the individual the question is, "How can I both be fully true to myself and add value to my society in the context in which I am situated?"

- For the individual as an agent within an organisation the question is, "How can we, collectively and systemically, add value to our society?"
- For leadership throughout the sector the question is, "How can this sector add value to the good of the nation?"

My reflective sense in relation to these questions is that I truly believe they are aspirational and reflect a view of society where a strong collective consciousness is being articulated through them. It is a consciousness that recognizes the connectedness of humanity. However, we live in a world that is never singular and simple, but one that is complex and conflict ridden. This in no way lessens our need, indeed it compounds it, as educators to see our work as engaging with the turmoil, albeit as conflicted professionals living with our own and our society's living contradictions. I think this is why living theory embraces this notion of living contradiction. Without it, we have disillusionment and despair. With it, we have the aspirational space for urging, encouraging and living out improvement.

## Locating Living Theory in Creative Holism

One of the contributions this research makes is in locating living theory within the framework of Creative Holism. I have argued that it is a profound system of self which, from a knowledge construction perspective, exemplifies the constructivist approach to knowledge and the positioning of social action as radical meaning making. I interpret radical in the sense that, rather than championing the cause of regulation and accepting the status quo, individuals use their powers of logic and reason to improve the world in which they have agency. In my view, this locating of living theory emphasizes the role of the individual who carries the torch for the kind of transformation that is required to bring about the necessary change in the FET Sector.

My final contribution as virtual consultant is to provide a viability framework based on VSM. This framework will take into account three levels of recursion. The system would be the system required at the level of the individual FET College, the sub-system would relate to a particular viable subsystem and supra-system. The sub-system would reside in the individual FET College, and might be a department or a campus. This is something that would need to be done in consultation with the individual college and for which an internal logic was developed, and for which design principles are suggested. The supra-system needs to take

the form of an inter-college unit at an appropriate level, which provides an integrative policy, information and resource locus. The reason this body cannot be a government body is simple – in its makeup it must allow for the institutional dynamic required in the FET Colleges to be recursive to the macro unit. Thus, this unit needs to exhibit responsivity and be representative of the partnership culture expected in the individual FET College. Thus design principles are also suggested.

I return to the work of Svensson and Nilsson (2008), as referenced in Chapter 3. They indicated four dilemmas in partnerships. I believe that the lessons are highly reflective of the issues that have arisen in this thesis and thus add an invaluable perspective to further work that will need to be done if the proposals provided in this thesis are followed.

The questions to follow through are:

1. Is there a growing sense of professional identity of the FET manager and is the sense of disjuncture with their organisations one which is changing for the good?

2. Is there a systemic understanding in the institutions, as indicated through a deep evidenced understanding and application of responsivity?

3. Are the FET Colleges truly exhibiting the democratic principles with transformation linking the state and the market and drawing in the concerns of civil society?

4. Is true viability becoming a defining characteristic of the sector?

I have drawn on Creative Holism as a systems methodology for a number of reasons. As a methodology it has grown through the work of practitioners who work at the interface of practice and research, thus for me it is a highly appropriate methodology for a DBA, which in its conceptualization straddles research endeavour with professional practice. It provides an approach which recognizes the layered and complex nature of organizational life. It proposes a methodology which allows one to address what is considered to be a primary issue, with the realization that involvement in the organization through addressing that primary issue will raise other issues which will also need to be considered. While at the same time, the intervention itself will cause a reconfiguration of meaning within the constituents in the organization.

In Creative Holism, and all the systems methodologies it draws upon, there are two important considerations. The first is that drawing theoretical boundaries around any issue is merely a device to make intervention possible. It creates a simplification with which one can work.  No theme, organization, or organisational practice can be considered in isolation. Thus, the interconnectedness of systems, and the determination of a system within its environment, calls for the making of a boundary judgment. The second is that systems methodologies are based on participation between the one intervening and those being the subjects of that intervention. Different methodologies require the interrelationship to be approached in different ways determined by the perception of the way power relationships are configured and the complexity of the organization and the problematical situation. Thus, in this research, I have employed the device of being a "virtual consultant" and have drawn attention to the distinction between different forms of agency depending on whether one is a member of an organization or brought in as a consultant. The role I figured out for my involvement was that of virtual consultant with a virtual client. I was not employed as a consultant, but was appointed as a programme co-ordinator and self-appointed as mentor and collaborator in facilitating change.  I believe that this device and the rationale for it has contributed to my learning, especially as I work with students confronted with the same problem of defining their roles as researchers and agents of change.

My general impression substantiated through my on-going conversations and reading of their written work was that the call for the FET Colleges to be responsive and the development of a partnership strategy to actualize responsivity is something that will take considerable time and effort. Both the internal environments of the FET organisations and the external environments in which they work display considerable turbulence. Thus, while responsivity through partnerships is an ideal strategy, its realization is going to take considerable effort over time.

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