

An Exploration of Organisational Effectiveness in a College of Further Education

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Abstract

This thesis explores organisational effectiveness in a college of further education using a multiple constituency model and acknowledges the central position of organisational learning and leadership. Prior to the commencement of the research the college had received a damning inspection report which categorised it as a failing college. Considerable managerial restructuring had taken place with five principals in four years. In addition, the college had financial difficulties and a poor image in the local media.

Taking a largely qualitative research paradigm, mixed methods including ethnography and action research are employed. To set the college in context, the research commences with an examination of the college through the eyes of its stakeholders. As the research unfolds a variety of approaches and techniques are used including an adaptation of Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory, small group interviews, a survey and content analysis. Data sources include official inspection reports, college documents, articles and letters in national and local newspapers, staff and student induction feedback, repertory grid interviews and staff coursework assignments. Major differences were revealed in the core constructs held by the staff and management respectively and in their perceptions of each other. Results of a national staff satisfaction survey employing qualitative and quantitative techniques enabled the college to be benchmarked against others and showed it in an unfavourable light. Throughout the research, interventions were attempted in an action research framework and the responses to these changes were considered in the analyses.

The findings argue that an understanding of the stakeholders' constructs of the college is central to the achievement of any improvement in its effectiveness. It furthers the understanding of organisational effectiveness by exploring the importance and difficulties in reconciling the different constructs used by stakeholders. The findings revealed a lack of congruence between the espoused theories and theories-in-use of the management and staff. It clearly suggests that the key groups' constructs were irreconcilable. The research emphasises the impact of managers and leaders on the process of effectiveness.

In addition, the work adds to the existing models of action research by revealing the constraints imposed by a hostile research environment. The thesis also shows how the singular nature of a geographically isolated college impacts upon stakeholder perceptions and the consequences this has for the achievement of effectiveness.

Contents	Page
Introduction	7
Chapter 1 A Literature Review of Action Research	19
Chapter 2 The Research Methodology	39
Chapter 3 The Researcher's Stance and an autobiographical note	54
The Initial Research Cycle	
Chapter 4 Organisational Effectiveness	59
Chapter 5 Leadership	85
Chapter 6 The Isle of Wight College in Context	95
Chapter 7 Exploring Stakeholder Groups	127
Chapter 8 Stakeholders' Personal Constructs	135
Chapter 9 The Senior Curriculum Managers	206
Second Cycle	
Chapter 10 Exploring Staff Perspectives, Part One	256
Chapter 11 Exploring Staff Perspectives, Part Two	260
Chapter 12 Leadership re-visited	291
Chapter 13 Conclusion and Recommendations	305
Appendix 1 Examples of negative and neutral press coverage	333
Appendix 2 Examples of positive letters	336
Appendix 3 Repertory grid correlation tree	337
Appendix 4 Staff survey questionnaire	338
Appendix 5 Focus Group Interviews	342
References	347

List of Figures		Page
Fig. 0.1	Main sources of data	16
Fig. 0.2	The research methods in outline	17
Fig. 4.1	Titles of performance indicators	72
Fig. 4.2	Towards a local solution	83
Fig. 6.1	National aggregated grades for colleges inspected during 1998-1999	99
Fig. 6.2	Isle of Wight College inspection grades 1999	100
Fig. 6.3	Non-paid for references to the college in The County Press	111
Fig. 6.4	% of newspaper articles, positive, negative or neutral, about the college	112
Fig. 6.5	Letters to the County Press 1999-2001, containing references to the college	119
Fig. 6.6	Non-paid for cuttings/editorial features/letters in the County Press containing references to the college	122
Fig. 6.7	National newspaper articles referring to the Isle of Wight College	123
Fig. 6.8	Positive or neutral headlines in the Isle of Wight County Press since February 1998 containing the word 'College'	124
Fig. 6.9	Negative headlines in the Isle of Wight County Press since February 1998 containing the word 'College'	125
Fig. 6.10	Letters to the County Press with references to the college	126
Fig. 10.1	An example of a survey statement	231
Fig. 10.2	Staff survey statement index	232
Fig. 10.3	Staff numbers 1999/2000	236
Fig. 10.4	FEDA survey – employment status of respondents	238
Fig. 10.5	FEDA survey – gender analysis	238
Fig. 10.6	FEDA survey – age analysis	239
Fig. 10.7	Report on FEDA staff satisfaction benchmarking survey	250
Fig. 10.8	FEDA survey. Issues raised in virtually all colleges	256

Fig. 10.9	Summary of free text responses from the staff satisfaction survey (summer 2000)	257
Fig. 11.1	FEDA survey – free text responses. Employment status of respondents	261
Fig. 11.2	FEDA survey – free text responses as a % of college staff	262
Fig. 11.3	College and overall survey results of the free text responses	263
Fig. 11.4	FEDA survey – analysis of the ‘free’ responses	275
Fig. 11.5	Free text responses. Most frequently coded topics	278
Fig. 11.6	No gender classification	279
Fig. 11.7	Gender of free text responses	281
Fig. 13.1	Lewin’s three stage process	319
Fig. 13.2	Force field analysis	328

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Introduction

The research grew out of a number of sources relating to my initial observations of the college. I had previously worked in five colleges before joining the Isle of Wight College in 1997, and in 1998 I embarked upon the DBA programme. It became apparent that the college was different from the others I had worked in or knew, if only because so many colleagues kept assuring me that it was different. Added to this was the very poor inspection report and the managerial disruption caused by the short-lived principalship of Principal X, thus providing a subject for an action research project. My initial idea was to explore what organisational effectiveness was in terms of a college of further education, to discover if (as seemed likely) the college was ineffective, and to do something to improve it. Effectiveness is examined from a number of perspectives, and the models of effectiveness within which the research developed changed during the course of the research. Similarly the action research framework and expectations of achieving an identifiable beneficial intervention had to be revised due to the unexpected nature of some of the issues that were revealed. Consequently the thesis explores three broad themes; organisational effectiveness, action research and further education.

The College

The Isle of Wight College is a medium-sized college of further education, which because of its geographical position offers a particularly wide curriculum serving a mixed urban and rural population of 127,000. It has an FTE (full time equivalent) staff of 350. Being the only college on the Island, the degree of competition has traditionally been relatively weak, and the effects of incorporation, when further education colleges were removed

from local education authority control, were slow to impact upon the college compared to the rest of the sector, but in the last three years (1998-2000), the rate and scale of change have increased. The College has struggled to come to terms with incorporation with an allegedly complacent attitude being rudely challenged by a number of major upheavals. The generally agreed need to change staff attitude and behaviour has resulted in several intense periods of management restructuring. Leadership and management changes have been quite dramatic with the resignation of two Principals, one Vice-Principal, two Finance Directors and the Director of Curriculum Management and Development during the past five years (1997-2002). There have been a total of five principals in five years and many changes in personnel at middle manager level. These management changes have been accompanied by a number of re-structuring exercises, severe financial difficulties and a number of redundancies, some of which have resulted in Industrial Tribunal cases which in turn attracted unfavourable publicity, as did a poor inspection report by the FEFC (Further Education Funding Council).

The retirement of the then Principal in July 1998 was taken as an opportunity for change. The college was in financial difficulties, the buildings were in a poor state of repair, and the structure of the six departments was one that created a parochial and competitive environment leading to sub-optimization. The arrival of X as Principal in September 1998 was to herald what was widely perceived as a nightmare scenario for both management and staff. The resultant restructuring which took place within six weeks of X's arrival, was far-reaching and fundamental. Much of the middle management structure was removed, with the remaining six curriculum managers given an increasing workload by both managing a department and taking on a cross-college role. The effect

of the re-organisation permeated through all levels of the organisation and sections of the wider island community. Staff were seen to be at best disconcerted, and at worst devastated, and they found it difficult to hide their feelings. The remaining managers, tied to the local area by family, commitments and geography, had to make the best of a very poor situation. Working relationships and long term friendships were broken; students were left without suitable replacement tutors, and sickness levels amongst staff began to rise. Of the six curriculum managers previously mentioned, three were demoted and three were given additional responsibilities.

An inspection by the FEFC in February 1999 identified the College as failing. Many of the staff, management and governors, rightly or wrongly, questioned the validity of the inspection in informal discussions. In March 1999 Principal X left the College following a vote of no confidence by teaching staff, support staff and governors. He left trailing accusations of improprieties in his initial application and a secret financial settlement. His departure left the Vice-Principal as acting Principal for six months until the appointment of a new Principal, Y in September 1999. During these six months a new governing body was also constituted with a new committee structure.

A re-inspection by the FEFC in February 2000 removed the failing status, whilst still identifying major concerns with the College. The re-inspection was followed by another re-organisation of the structure with the abolition of the six academic departments and their replacement by twelve programme areas, three deputy directors and a number of middle manager posts, to create a hybrid matrix structure. In November 2001 Principal Y left the college. These events are explored further in Chapter six, The Isle of Wight

College in Context where various stakeholders describe the college and give their perceptions. This chapter illustrates the strength of feelings held about the college and shows the impact of these events on the stakeholders and their corresponding influence on the college's effectiveness.

The College Environment

The College operates in a number of overlapping environments. Unusually, there is little direct competition from other colleges due to its island situation, but there are five 13-18 High Schools and an increasing number of private providers, all of whom offer an increasingly competitive range of courses, including the core curriculum areas of business, catering, health and social care, computing and engineering. The broad economic environment was determined by the funding regime administered by the FEFC (Further Education Funding Council, since replaced by the Learning and Skills Council), and is largely determined by the three'Rs': recruitment, retention and results (achievements). The political environment has changed dramatically in recent years with the decline in the influence of the local authority and the rise in the power of central government with its influence largely manifested through the funding regime.

These stakeholders affected the picture presented of the college in official reports, and perhaps more importantly, the way in which it was subsequently reported in the local press. It became increasingly apparent that these stakeholder perceptions directly influenced the processes that affected the effectiveness as measured by the achievement of a minimum of satisfaction for those same stakeholders.

The Research

The starting point for this research is based upon Polany's (1958) work when he explains that the basis of personal knowledge lies in terms of a decision to understand the world from one's own point of view as an individual claiming originality and expressing judgement responsibly. I have existing views on organisational effectiveness in general and organisational effectiveness in a college in particular. However, there is a need to inform these views in a practical and philosophical sense by enquiring into organisational effectiveness and my own role in improving effectiveness by developing what Whitehead (1998) refers to as living theories, that focus on asking, answering and researching questions such as, 'How do I improve what I am doing'. As an action researcher I intended to use action/reflection cycles that will take the enquiry forward.

The concept of organisational effectiveness has been examined from many different aspects within the field of management and organisational behaviour and there are a number of models of organisational effectiveness. One approach is to examine the design of organisational structure and development systems used for co-ordination and control, whilst also considering the culture, 'the biological glue' that Mintzberg and Quinn (1995) assert holds an organisation together. This culture enhances its ability to pursue strategies on the one hand, but sometimes impedes strategic change on the other. Another approach attempts to explore the relationship between the Seven S's, namely structure, strategy, systems, style, skills, staff and subordinate goals (Waterman, Peters and Phillips 1980). They argue that the central idea is that organisational effectiveness, stems from the interaction of several factors - some not especially obvious and some under-analysed, and these influence an organisation's ability to change and achieve

effectiveness. This thesis aims to add to that analysis by taking an action-research, interventionist and reflective approach to the development of effectiveness. It also seeks to identify those features of the organisation that form the 'biological glue' that holds it together and makes it distinctive.

A further explanation of effectiveness is provided by Johnson and Scholes (1997) who equate effectiveness with added value, ie that the assessment of effectiveness is essentially related to how well the organisation is matching its services to the identified needs of its chosen customers and the competencies which underpin this effectiveness and or vice versa. The potential sources of effectiveness were always likely to be many and varied and only revealed themselves as the research progressed. The key question was: what are the critically important features and the core competencies that underpin these features?' This thesis endeavours to identify the needs of the stakeholder groups, and their perceptions of the critically important features.

The official analyses of organisational effectiveness in the further education sector are carried out by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) who, unsurprisingly given their remit to ensure the efficient distribution of public funds, uses a goal-based approach. It assesses colleges by measuring achievable and time limited goals that are pre-determined by the FEFC. In this research I intend to take a radically different approach to the monitoring of effectiveness by taking Argyris and Schon's 1974 approach to learning as a process of discovery of a problem, followed by the development of a solution, and finally monitoring the implementation of the solution in

order to enhance its effectiveness. Hopefully this monitoring, including reflections on its limitations may lead to new insights.

The individual and group nature of the research concentrates on human beings who are significantly influenced by the context in which the research developed. This should contrast starkly with the FEFC's superficially scientific-positivist analyses using its own numerical scales and criteria. In comparison my use of repertory grid interviews ensured that individual voices are heard with the minimum of interviewer influence, similarly the small group interviews were conducted in a very open manner.

Another approach to organisational effectiveness has been taken by researchers at the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) 1999, who used large-scale surveys to 'discover' what students want, and what gives them satisfaction. This research does not seek to replicate the FEDA survey; instead it will actively seek to intervene in a small but focused way in order to improve the organisation's effectiveness, using the action research techniques and cycles of co-enquiry, intervention, monitoring and reflection.

The research developed into two cycles. The initial cycle explored the nature of organisational effectiveness within a college context, and used the multiple constituency approach as the indicator of effectiveness, through an exploration of what were expected to be the main stakeholder groups. I expected the students to be the most important stakeholder group, as they constituted the basic reason for the organisation's existence. They would also affect many of the indicators used by the FEFC to measure the college's effectiveness. However the small group interviews, confirmed other evidence

provided by student surveys, that the student body was sufficiently satisfied by the college. Instead, as the research developed it became clear that there were three other key groups and associated themes. These emerged as external stakeholders' perceptions, staff and management relationships, and leadership. These key groups and themes are explored in the second cycle.

The first two chapters explore the literature of action research and discuss issues of methodology and research design, and chapter four explores the literature of organisational effectiveness and proposes a suitable model for a college of further education. This action research thesis accepted that changes to improve effectiveness would only take place in small steps. I attempted to change others; I certainly changed myself. Consequently chapter three consists mainly of a short statement on my position as researcher. It also contains a brief autobiographical note. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) claim that action research focuses on the 'I', the self studying the self, but in a way that is done with and for others ie it is not a self-centred activity.

However, whilst the aim of much action research is personal improvement for social transformation, so it is essentially collaborative, and that is the case with this research that utilises help from colleagues in the college. It may be helpful to emphasise that the order in which the thesis is presented is not necessarily identical to the order in which the data was collected. Instead I have used a mixture of themes and largely chronological cycles. The initial cycle of research opens with an exploration of organisational effectiveness in a college (Chapter four) and the role of leadership in achieving effectiveness (Chapter five). Chapter six considers The Isle of Wight College

in its context. By utilising the multiple constituency approach to organisational effectiveness, the research involves the different stakeholder groups in order to discover their perceptions and their rights and claims. It examines the tensions that occur between their expectations and experiences. The research methods included small open-ended focus group interviews, analyses of college documents, student assignments, inspection reports and a content analysis of local newspaper reports and letters. The chapter concentrates upon the perceptions of the core stakeholder groups, exploring how the college's activities and processes are affected by their perceptions, and attempts to discover how these are built up and how I could introduce action-based interventions to bring the reality of their experiences closer to their expectations. Chapter seven uses focus groups to uncover the views of two important groups, new students and new staff. Their views were interesting but unsurprising. What was revelatory was the management's response to these views, and the effect this was to have on my research. This revelation pointed to the importance of organisational learning as a prime contributor to the foundations of the effectiveness framework, and the impact that the management use of inconsistent 'theories in use and espoused theories' (Argyris 1994) has on the process of effectiveness. Outlines of the main sources of data and the research methods are shown below.

Figure 0.1

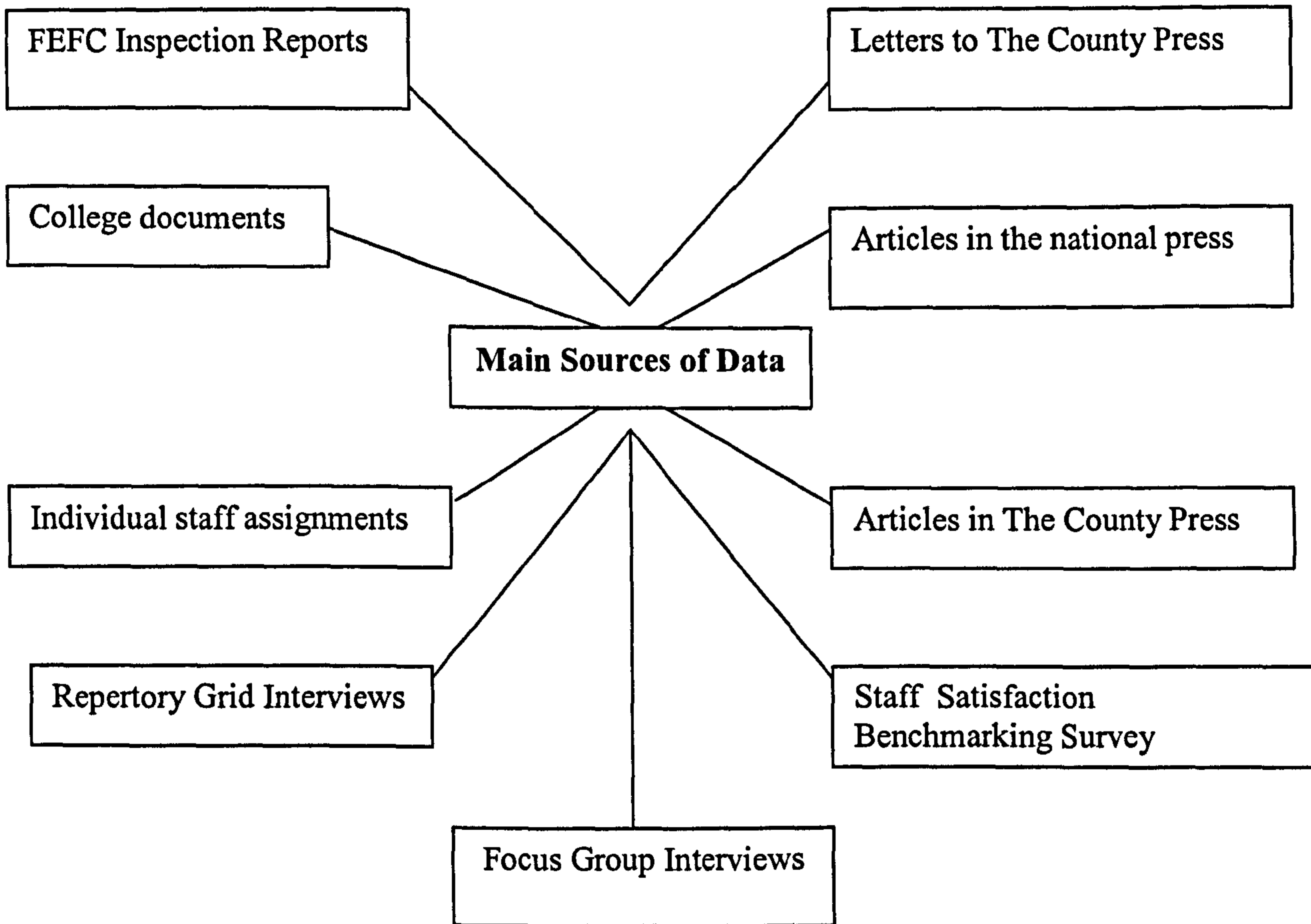
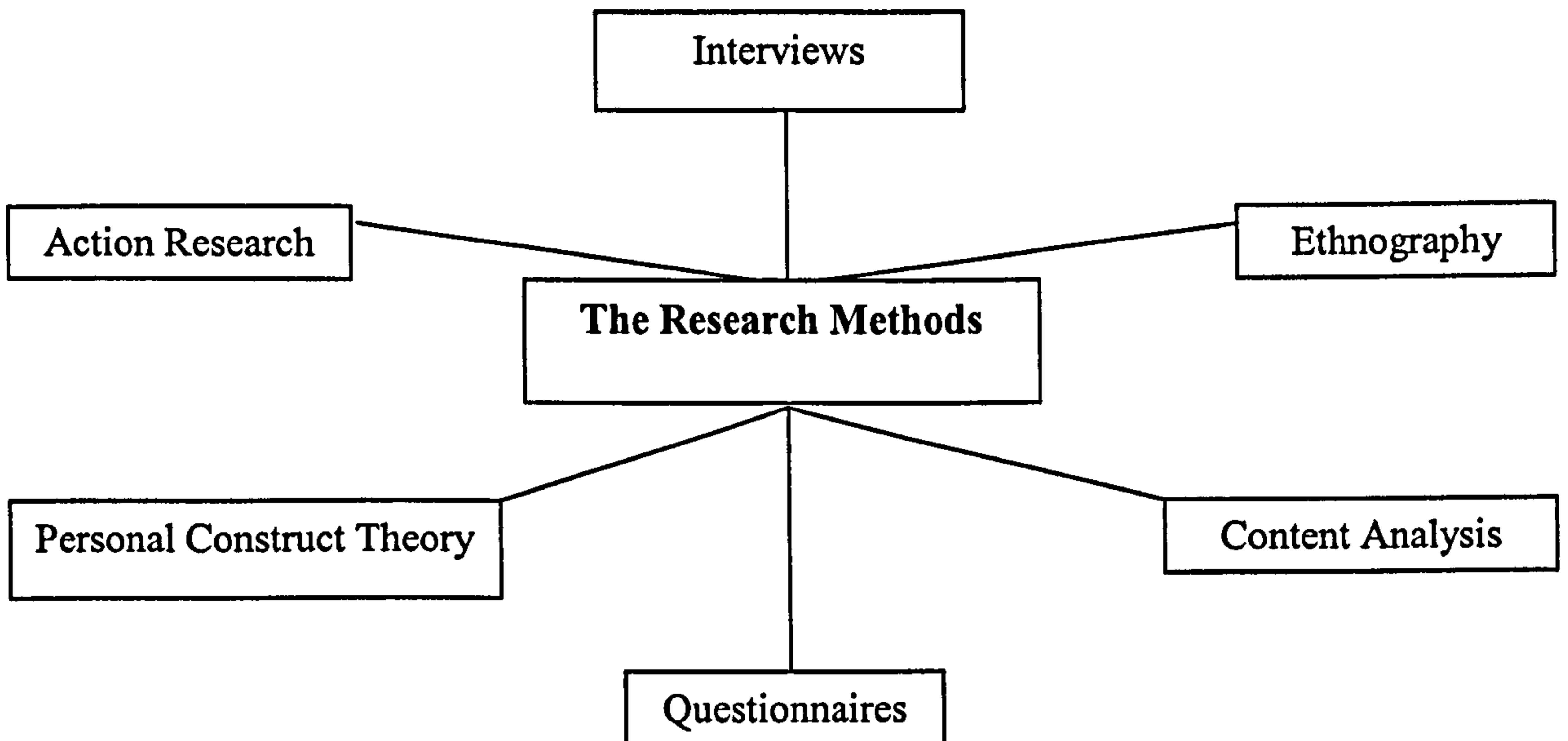


Figure 0.2



Chapters eight and nine are based on the theory of personal construct analysis (Kelly 1955) and repertory grid interviews. This enabled me to explore in more detail the patterns that were emerging in chapters four, five and six. The repertory grid interviewing technique allowed me to discover the core constructs determining the interviewee/stakeholders' engagement with the college. It explained much of significance about the barriers to achieving effectiveness. Chapter nine ends with a reflection on the first cycle of research. This pointed the way for the second cycle with its further analysis of the key stakeholder groups and the themes of leadership and the process of achieving effectiveness.

The second cycle starts in chapter ten with an analysis of staff attitudes through a large-scale survey. This was part of a national survey carried out by FEDA (the Further Education Development Agency). The chapter analyses the closed questions and takes essentially a quantitative approach. Chapter eleven uses qualitative methods to explore the survey's free text or open questions. Both these chapters reveal more about the main barriers to the achievement of effectiveness.

Chapter twelve takes one of these major barriers revealed by the responses to the FEDA survey and the findings of the group and individual interviews, namely leadership, and examines it in terms of its influence on effectiveness.

The final chapter links together the work in the previous chapters to make conclusions and recommendations about the college's effectiveness. It also reflects upon action research as a process in a less than supportive environment. Finally the research is intended to develop an epistemology, Everitt and Fisher (1995), of my own personal practice that may in turn contribute to a wider epistemology of practice.

During the research cycles I endeavored to use 'double-loop' learning, what Argyris and Schon (1974) describe as theories in use. Consequently by carrying out interventions by doing something to others in my behavioral world, I expected my own views and perceptions to change, and they did.

Chapter 1

A Literature Review of Action Research Methodology

Assumptions of the main Paradigms

The ontological assumption made at the outset of this research was that reality is subjective and multiple as seen by the participants in the study. This was deemed to be particularly apposite because I intended to use the multiple constituency model to explore the college's effectiveness, as explained in chapter four, and to use construct theory to examine different stakeholders' social constructs and perceptions of the college and its effectiveness. Therefore, I chose to utilise a qualitative paradigm for the research, although I did utilise some quantitative methods during the second cycle of research. It could be argued that I took a pragmatic approach, as I was willing to 'thrive', to use Johnson and Dubberley's terminology, on a variety of methods (Johnson and Dubberley 2000:167)

The relationship between myself as researcher and the college and its stakeholders ie my epistemology is qualitative inasmuch as I interacted with that being researched, and do not claim to have taken an independent or objective stance. Instead I attempted to minimise the difference between the research and myself. The contrast between the two epistemological assumptions can be summarised as:

'In quantitative research facts act to constrain our beliefs; while in interpretive research beliefs determine what should count as facts.'

(Smith 1983:10)

I have also taken the stance that I have values that help to determine what I saw as facts and how I interpreted these facts. This 'bias' is acknowledged throughout the research. I believe that by taking this initial qualitative epistemological stance I was able to explore the issues more thoroughly, whilst remaining open to other methods taken from other epistemologies, as proposed by the following injunction:

'Researchers have to position themselves within the epistemologies to be able to see the limitations of their own ways of thinking and to gain inspiration for new interesting research questions derived from other epistemological areas.'

(von Krogh et al. 1998:28)

It may be more useful to describe this research paradigm as phenomenological rather than qualitative because phenomenology provides greater scope for the use of quantitative in addition to qualitative data. Whichever epistemological paradigm is claimed for the research, there remains the central issue of how reliable is the knowledge revealed by the research, and 'the problem of circularity' (Johnson and Dubberley 2000: 3). In order to have a theory of knowledge I must presuppose the conditions in which knowledge takes place, and understand my own assumptions while accepting that the research findings may challenge my assumptions. This issue was particularly important as I was researching my own organisation, about which I hold strong views and naturally have my own constructs, and these were challenged as the research progressed. I was concerned to understand people's meanings for their values and actions, rather than to simply observe and record their actions. Consequently I thought it would be best to explore the stakeholders' constructs within the phenomenological, anti-positivist epistemology. The logic of enquiry, which flowed from this anti-positivist "ontology and epistemology", was to seek to understand the stakeholders'/participants' own

perceptions and interpretations of the world, with an emphasis upon qualitative rather than quantitative data.

This in turn led to action research being selected as the most appropriate methodology because it allowed for my involvement with the participants rather than detached observation. In particular the use of Repertory Grid interviews in the first cycle of research was selected as a method for exploring the participants' constructs of the college.

Action research was also selected because it provides 'a very practical way of looking at your own work in order to check whether it is as you would like it to be' (McNiff, 1995: 7). Therefore the idea of self-reflection is central to the research. It encourages enquiry into the self as well as the other participants. It also allows the research to develop, as there is no initial fixed hypothesis. Consequently this research involves two major cycles, a mixture of methods and self-reflection within a broadly humanist, non-positivist epistemology.

Action Research

In this chapter I will explore the literature on action research and will attempt to justify its use as the appropriate methodology for examining organisational effectiveness in a college of further education. The chapter also addresses some of the limitations and challenges faced by the action researcher when the research findings impact upon the working relationship between the researcher and senior managers. It also looks at the

ethical considerations that are evident when action research is affected by political power considerations. Finally I will show how the methods used in the research were driven by the methodology, time availability, access to data and acceptability in the college setting.

Although the methodology used is primarily action research it does include methods from other research methodologies within the same family including action learning, participatory action research and action science. Action research has been described as an informal, qualitative, formative, subjective, interpretive, reflective and experiential model of inquiry in which all individuals involved in the study are knowing and contributing participants (Hopkins, 1985). One primary intent of action research is to provide a framework for qualitative investigations by researchers in complex working institutions. However, I did utilise a mixed methodology by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Hopkins cites a number of useful definitions of action research that are particularly interesting because they concentrate on action research in education, and in quoting them I can examine the constraints imposed on an action research project, which explores an educational institution rather than education or teaching.

Action Research ... aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable framework.

- Rapoport (cited in Hopkins, 1985)

Action Research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to

improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. It is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively ... sometimes in co-operation with outsiders.

- Kemmis (cited in Hopkins, 1985)

(Action Research) ... is the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practise by groups of participants by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflections upon the effects of those actions

- Ebbutt (cited in Hopkins, 1985)

The action research methodology was most appropriate for me (please see the next chapter) as a number of shortcomings in the college's effectiveness had been identified by stakeholders, and I wanted to adopt an initial stance to the problem by examining stakeholder perceptions, formulate a plan, carry out an intervention, evaluate the outcomes and develop further strategies in an iterative fashion. The fact that the research did not pan out in this nice fashion is part of the excitement of action research. In the event I had to develop my own variant of action research: my own living theory. The validity of such an approach is provided by Polanyi (1958) who explained the basis of personal knowledge in terms of a decision to understand the world from one's own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgement responsibly (Whitehead 1998). Its value should be not only in the theory that emerges, and the

theory that is tested, but should also be of practical relevance to the participants during the course of the research.

Action research usually incorporates five main principles, and I will now explore these in relation to my own research using the literature review to illustrate these principles. The first is that action research tends to be cyclical, with similar steps recurring in a similar sequence. One such cycle is considered by Elliott (in Hopkins, 1993):

- Initially an exploratory stance is adopted, where an understanding of a problem is developed and plans are made for some form of intervention strategy
- Then the intervention is carried out
- During and around the time of the intervention, pertinent observations are collected in various forms
- The new interventional strategies are carried out and the cyclic process repeats, continuing until a sufficient understanding of (or implementable solution for) the problem is achieved.

This cyclical approach increases the rigour of the research (Kemmis 1990) as the early cycles are used to help decide how to conduct the later cycles, and in the later cycles, the interpretations developed in the early cycles can be tested and challenged and refined. This iterative approach was utilised in my research as the two major cycles, consisting of Repertory Grid interviews and the staff satisfaction survey. These were supported by other data and evidence that constituted smaller cycles, all of which informed the next cycle, which in turn informed the interpretation and analysis of the previous cycle. Kemmis (1985) represents this process figuratively as a series of linked cycles with each

cycle consisting of a plan followed by action, observation and reflection that then informs a revised plan thus initiating the next cycle.

Secondly, the process is participative with the clients and informants involved as partners, or at least as active participants, in the process. This participation in a collaborative process of inquiry has been proposed by many writers including Whyte et al. (1991:20) who state that ‘...some of the people in the organisation or community under study participate actively with the professional researcher throughout the research process from the initial design to the final presentation of results and discussion of their action and implications.’ This participation and collaboration was only partially achieved during my own research, as the findings began increasingly to involve power and political relationships, including my own, and the planned degree of participation was diminished. Burman in Banister et al (1994) explores this issue. Here she discusses how anxieties over the impact of research findings and relationships within workplace networks can reflect the power of both the researcher and others within a study. She illustrates this by reference to an unpublished thesis by Bewley (1993): ‘there is an equivalent issue in relation to dilemmas of “exposure to unsympathetic audiences” raised in her research. At each point in the process of revision and resubmission, Bewley was struggling with decisions about whether, as some of Bewley’s friends encouraged her, to ‘write it to pass’ or whether doing this would so compromise the research that it would lose its value or meaning – both personally and in terms of its theoretical coherence. Whilst Bewley and Burman were writing about feminist issues, the questions of compromise and coherence were ones that I also faced. I intended to include all participants and recipients in the design of the initial and subsequent cycles

of research, but in the event this proved impossible, and this is discussed later in this thesis. However, I did include some colleagues in the design of the research and attempted to disseminate the findings, but not as successfully as I initially hoped. The dissemination was by individual briefing, group briefing and written reports and memoranda, and some of these are included in the text.

The third principle is that the research be qualitative ie dealing more with the interpretation of meanings rather than with numbers. The hope is that qualitative information increases responsiveness, reduces interviewer bias and encourages a diversity and richness of response. I took from this principle the view that the research should deal 'more' with language, rather than solely with language. Consequently I used a mixed methodology that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches. This mixed methodology is supported by Tashakkori and Teddle 1998, who argue the benefits of a pragmatic approach whereby research questions drive decisions about methodology, and that action research involves 'real-world, immediate problems of concern to policy-makers or organisations, and in solving these problems the most useful results and clearest understanding are achieved when the problem itself drives the choice of methodology'.

My desire to use both interpretative and quantitative methods also arose from my intention to use triangulation in the research ie to use a variety of vantage points, reflecting a commitment to thoroughness, flexibility and differences of experience. I state this, not because I have some inherent virtue, but because my previous empirical background in economics required a shift of paradigm from me, and so I felt more

comfortable using a variety of methods. I also found it enjoyable to experience these different methods! Consequently I used combinations of methods, including perspectives taken by different investigators and participants. There is a danger with triangulation that the choice of other perspectives is used to reinforce one's own view, rather than to show conflicting or at least different viewpoints. I hoped that the triangulation used would provide both an extension and a deepening of the descriptions. Consequently I used theoretical triangulation which utilises psychological and business literature as well as method triangulation, as I combined both qualitative and quantitative methods similar to Brannen and Moss (1991) finding as they did, 'In general the data analysed qualitatively proved useful in the identification of conceptual issues; the qualitative analysis fleshed out the coded responses, elaborating the meanings already encapsulated in the codes or adding new meanings' (Brannen and Moss 1991:19). This was especially the case in my qualitative analysis of the free text responses to the FEDA questionnaire and the consequent coding to provide a quantitative analysis, which resulted in further stages of re-coding and qualitative analysis.

The fourth principle is that action research should be reflective with a critical reflection upon the process and the outcomes. Reflexivity is perhaps the most distinctive feature of qualitative research, (Tindall 1994) as it is an attempt to make explicit the process by which the material and analysis are produced. It is a concept which is particularly central to the personal construct theory utilised in the first cycle of my research, where the researched are collaborating in the construction of knowledge about the college. According to Wilkinson (1998:493), 'at its simplest, however, it may be considered to

be disciplined self reflection.’ Wilkinson develops the concept and identifies personal, functional and disciplinary reflexivity.

Personal reflexivity acknowledges whom I am as a researcher, revealing how my personal interests and values influenced the research process. Functional and disciplinary reflexivity acknowledge my position as researcher in the construction of knowledge, and how who I am directed and shaped the course of the research. This reflexivity should enable the reader to judge the content of my research in the context of the values, assumptions and biases that I brought to it. The validity of the research becomes focused on personal and interpersonal qualities rather than method. It is ‘knowledge in process, which is tied up with a particular knower’ (Reason and Rowan 1981:250).

Therefore, each cycle contains a step composed of critical reflection. This should have increased the understanding needed to inform the next cycle in the research.

The fifth principle is that some form of action should take place as part of the research. This requires the researcher to become involved in the cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection as proposed by Kemmis (1985). This principle is based on the writing of the ‘father of action research,’ Lewin, 1946, and emphasised most notably by recent writers such as Reason (1994) and Argyris and Schön (1996). The aim of action research is for the ‘question’ to arise out of the problems faced by myself as practitioner, and it is a further important aspect of this approach that the analysis of the situation takes place in situ. This was certainly the case as the nature of the ‘problem’

became clearer and more refined as the research progressed. The immediate aim of the research was to understand these problems, which in this case were encapsulated in the questions, 'is this an effective organisation, and if not, why not?' My immediate aim, as a researcher was to formulate speculative and tentative general principles about the problems once identified. From these it may be possible to generate hypotheses about what action is likely to lead to the desired improvements. The initial intention was to pursue the 'classical' action research approach (Lewin, 1946) by carrying out an action and collecting data on its effect and then to revise the earlier hypothesis. However, as is explained elsewhere, the degree of action was much less than intended due to the politics of the situation. This affected the process set out in the following definition:

Essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. This means that a step-by-step process is constantly monitored over varying periods of time and by a variety of techniques ... diaries, interviews, case studies etc., so that the ensuing feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustments, directional changes, redefinitions as necessary.

Cohen and Manion (1980:47)

The action and evaluation processes took place separately but simultaneously, although it is difficult to distinguish nice categories of activity during the research process. I also attempted to change people's behaviour through a small degree of participatory or collaborative research whereby the people being studied had the opportunity to make decisions about the study's format and data analysis. Perhaps more importantly I used a combination of demystification and needs assessment as the major change activities.

These also affected my own knowledge and actions as I tried to find a deeper understanding of the organisation and ways of improving it. Lewin (1946:36) emphasised the practical relevance of action research to help people evaluate their own actions. As I gathered data in both traditional and innovative ways I continually attempted interventions in a series of feedback loops, but distinguishing between these separate activities is quite difficult. Lewin maintains that meaningful research must help people to consider the effects of their action, by setting up cycles of action and reflection as part of the action research project (Lewin 1946:37). Lewin's proposals of setting up small experiments in the social field and helping people to evaluate the change plans makes the action research appear positivist by examining and then explaining the relationship between variables, but this would be too simplistic a view. More pertinently Lewin and later writers, notably Argyris and Schön (1974 and 1996) emphasise the need to help people plan their actions by considering the whole contexts within which their actions take place. Whether or not behaviour changed because of my research is difficult to assess. As the interventions (actions) took place as an inherent and immediate part of the research within the institutional context it is very difficult to know what action produced what results. What I can maintain is that my own understanding and action changed, and that whilst the amount of institutional change was apparently disappointingly small, the very lack of change was extremely instructive as it supported my conclusions about the nature of the organisation's ineffectiveness. Hopefully the demystification opportunities provided by the research ie the very act of obtaining knowledge and its dissemination, creates the potential for change.

The research utilised reflexivity throughout. It involved my own personal reflexivity, acknowledging who I am and my individuality as a researcher. This personal level of involvement enabled me to select the methods and data within my own organisation, and to reflect upon them. Callway (1998:470) talks about the use of 'ourselves as our own sources', and Marshall (1986:197) acknowledges her level of engagement from the start, and like her, 'I have always chosen as research topics issues which have personal significance and which I need to explore in my own life.' Having worked in colleges for so many years, and coming to a college which was categorised as failing, and which contained people holding such apparent differences in perceptions, an exploration of the organisation's effectiveness was a natural choice, 'who I am directed and shaped the course of the research' (Wilkinson, 1988:495).

Reflexivity was important because by acknowledging my centrality in the construction of knowledge as DuBois (1983:111) states, 'the knower is part of the matrix of what is known'. Hollway (1989:9) takes this further by claiming 'that it was impossible to separate 'me' from 'theoretical ideas' from 'field notes'.

I attempted to capture the data whilst working within the college. Therefore the validity of this qualitative research is focused upon my own personal and interpersonal qualities rather than relying solely on the validity of the methods. It comprised 'knowledge in process, which is tied up with a particular knower' (Reason and Rowan 1981:250). There are also questions of interpreting the spoken words and writings of others, and the multiple roles I inhabit as researcher, colleague, subordinate, teacher and line manager. Choosing one's own organisation for an action research project presented many

challenges as well as the opportunity to engage in positive interventions to improve the college's effectiveness.

Ethics

The nature of action research raises a number of ethical questions. As a researcher attempting change interventions I had the responsibility of addressing the 'does the end justify the means' issue. In the view of Taylor (1994) 'the response has to be unequivocal: the action taken has to be in the best interests of the people involved; ethically there can be no place for conscious exploitation. Practitioner action researchers must work in such a way that they safeguard the practice aspects of their professional work while maintaining a rigorous and reflexive research stance.'

I found this purist view to be hard to maintain in practice. I was able to declare my research interests to the other participants. The broad purpose of the research was always made explicit to them, and the initial findings conveyed back to them either immediately as in the case of the repertory grid interviews, in the form of external data and reports with the staff satisfaction survey, or in the form of analyses and reports on all the data as I analysed it. The ethical concern for me occurred when my own depth of understanding changed, and the nature of what I believed to be the cause of the problem changed. Consequently the information I fed back to some of the key participants became less complete than I originally intended. Does the withholding of knowledge constitute unethical behaviour? I hope it doesn't constitute the exploitation of the participants. Perhaps I am being too precious about this issue, for to an extent no

researcher could practically reveal everything about their research to all the participants. You can only do what appears to be in the best interest of the organisation in the circumstances while acknowledging that action research can often involve the researcher in new sets of relations with colleagues and clients (Kemmis 1982). Heron and Reason (2000:179) report that co-operative research may require the researcher to 'manage effectively anxiety stirred up by the inquiry process.' My skills and potential to do this were affected by my own position in the organisation in relation to some of the main participants. Action research requires intervention in a world where everything is happening at once within multi-layered political contexts. The participants are much more than 'subjects' or scientific variables, and ultimately and hopefully they may become beneficiaries of the research. They are people complete with their emotional responses, needs, conceptualisations, defence mechanisms and working and social relationships. I have much sympathy with the Marxist and feminist viewpoint that we should not just understand the world but change it. As Taylor (1994) writes, 'many claim that objective value-free research is a cop-out, where the research becomes the end in itself and avoids the real issues of what you do about it, what you can do about it and what works.' I believe that I have done what is achievable in the circumstances without misleading any of the participants.

A further ethical consideration is raised by my use of ethnography as a research method, and the 'degree to which it is true that researchers exercise power over the people they study,' (Hammersley 1993:147). In this research I did not obtain access to interviewees via any powerful 'gatekeeper', whose very authority may have put pressure on people to cooperate with me. One way in which I may exert power is in my opportunity to publish

and disseminate my research, in a way that may not be available to the participants in the research. In this way, according to Hammersley, I 'may significantly shape the situation and fortunes of the people studied, and others', (Hammersley 1993: 148). Although this potential for the exploitation of my power exists, I do not believe there is a very real possibility of my research being exploitative, if only because it neither serves nor is it supported by the sources of power in the college. In addition the combination of the anonymity of all the contributors (with the exception of those people who are the most powerful in the college) and the confidentiality of the thesis, predicates against any exploitation.

What may be particular about the methodology of this research concerns the intertwining of ethical and practical issues caused by the political and power relationships. Action research assumes a degree of shared commitment and shared values between the researcher and the other participants. Even if they are not equal partners in the development of the methods, data collection and analysis, they should at least be involved in the reflection and development of further stages and cycles of research.

Confidentiality, First Thoughts

Confidentiality and anonymity are issues closely interwoven with protection of the participants, including in this case myself, and as the research developed the underlying principles affecting these issues changed. The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (Reber, 1985) provides the following definitions of anonymity and confidentiality:

‘anonymity – any condition in which one’s identity is unknown to others’

‘confidentiality – having the characteristics of being kept secret, an intimacy of knowledge, shared by a few who do not divulge it to others’

Anonymity has been maintained for all those participants who were either in a potentially vulnerable position or had asked for anonymity. Consequently all the interviews with students, lecturers and support staff, and all the questionnaires and free text responses completed by college staff have had their anonymity preserved. This has meant that some of the detail provided by the repertory grid interviewees has been omitted to ensure their anonymity. Where the respondents could be identified through their responses, I have also excluded anything that would pinpoint their identity.

However, I was faced with a major ethical question concerning some of the interviewees, notably Principal Y and other members of the executive. To achieve anonymity with these respondents would have rendered their responses as meaningless. Furthermore their responses are made more powerful because of who they are. Consequently I decided that their positions were sufficiently powerful to be able to cope with their identification within this research. Where participants may be identified by the nature of their job, I have not used real names since I believed that by so doing, my account preserves a degree of anonymity. As for my own position, I felt increasingly vulnerable as the research progressed and my reflections and analysis led to increasingly negative views of the college’s senior management. This led me reluctantly to finally request confidentiality for the final written project. This ensures a degree of anonymity

to even the identifiable participants and ironically provides me with protection from the same people. This confidentiality was not something I ever expected to request at the outset of the research, and I would like to stress it was very reluctantly requested as it seems to go against the ethos of action research.

One of the defining moments leading to the request for anonymity occurred with the response from the Principal and Executive to one of my early interim reports on the findings from my research. This response was so negative and striking that it became apparent that they were unwilling to engage in the research, and this unwillingness itself became part of the research and consequently made it difficult for me to relate the analysis back to the participants. Whilst the final dissertation is confidential to 'a few who do not divulge it to others', I have produced reports and disseminated many of the findings to interested parties, and these are examined throughout this dissertation. Therefore, some of the aims of an action research project have been achieved despite the confidentiality of the final report.

What follows is a short extract from my Learning Diary recounting a meeting with my supervisor, Dr Julia Kiely on 2 June 2000.

Confidentiality, continued

At a meeting with my DBA supervisor on 2 June 2000, we discussed my own concerns about my position within the college and its impact upon the action enquiry, and what follows are my reflections written in my Learning Diary and the decisions made.

My feeling is that I am both too involved with the issues due to my new post of Head of Human Resource Development, whilst at other times I feel too detached and too much like an observer. The central difficulty is my opinion of the new Principal Y, primarily resulting from the Repertory Grid interview with him where I was unconvinced by his vision, strategy and leadership style. This lack of any shared conviction about the college makes it very difficult to honestly reflect upon the interview with him, yet his views are central to the analysis of where the college is now, and how it is likely to change. In particular, how can I honestly reflect upon his role if those reflections are going to be critical, and if expressed in a public format they could adversely affect my personal and professional position?

Julia suggested that one solution would be to make the final thesis confidential to the University ie not for public dissemination. However, this would obviously limit the degree of openness and involvement with others that I have been endeavouring to develop. Nevertheless this seems to be the best option, although it leads to ethical issues particularly in the use of covert research and methodological issues concerning the research of sensitive issues, ethnography and organisational politics. This is likely to reduce the expected level of intervention at the end of the first cycle, with a greater emphasis on reflection and analysis. There will still be feedback to senior management, which may result in interventions. Whilst I will maintain

public confidentiality, the thesis will contain additional private reflections and analysis.

This need to keep the final thesis confidential, and the limiting of the public dissemination of any findings during the research cycle is unfortunate, unexpected and disappointing. In assuring all my interviewees of anonymity I have encouraged honesty and a great degree of self-revelation, particularly during the Repertory Grid interviews. However, in one case in particular, namely the interview with the Principal, it is impossible to both maintain anonymity and use the rich data, which the interview produced. For the interview data to be of use to my research the interviewee must be revealed as being the Principal. Without this revelation, the interview becomes of much less use. It is not just that his responses obviously reveal his identity – ways could be found to hide his identity – no, what is so important is that his responses during the interview were made by him as Principal, rather than by another member of the Executive or Senior Management Team. They illuminate and inform the rest of the research, and I cannot unlearn what I learnt from that interview. I cannot pretend that the interview did not take place; consequently I have taken the decision with Julia to make the thesis confidential to the University.

Chapter 2

The Research Methodology

'In essence, everyone is a total stranger to everyone else, and falls to be misjudged on the few and occasional fragments that he or she uncovers to hurried and self-interested companions.' *Raymond Robertson-Glasgow*

1 Introduction

This chapter addresses how the empirical work was carried out in the Isle of Wight College, and the methodological underpinning. It builds upon the last chapter, which explored the relevant literature relating to action research, and the ethical problems encountered. The research approach was primarily qualitative, involving participants' subjective views and responses, but also utilising quantitative data when appropriate. It seeks to understand the different perspectives stakeholders have and how these affect the effectiveness of the organisation. The research, even when it was quantitative, was carried out in an interpretative tradition (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) whereby I attempted to make sense of the accounts of individuals in terms that are appropriate to the people's culture (Morse, 1994), experiences and social constructs.

2 Stakeholders and Effectiveness

The research utilises triangulation; the use of different vantage points and takes a variety of forms. This is combined with multiple cycles of research, whereby it was necessary to be sensitive to the personal accounts, to attend to the emergent issues, and to research the material in order to develop adequate and grounded theory. Reason and Rowan (1981:247) claim that 'the validity of research is much enhanced by systematic use of

feedback loops and by going around the research cycle several times'. The triangulation occurred between the two major cycles of research and the many smaller reflective cycles. It also involved the use of combinations of methods, a range of participants – the different stakeholder groups, and to a limited extent, investigator triangulation. The major component of the first cycle involved a number of repertory grid interviews (Kelly 1955). These were accompanied by small group interviews, content analysis of documents and miscellaneous data eg a car parking survey. The repertory grid interviews explored the core constructs held by individuals concerning the college.

The second cycle had at its centre, a large-scale employee satisfaction survey, and in particular an analysis of the free text responses to the open questions.

3 The Choice of Methods

The decisions about which methods of data collection to use were driven by the underlying theoretical and methodological assumptions discussed earlier, but also took a pragmatic approach to what became available. The methods are discussed below.

4 The Early Steps

My initial contacts with key figures in the college, the Acting Principal and Director of Human Resources provided both support and access to information. This access was boosted by my appointment within the college in September 1999 to the position of Head of Human Resource Development (Staff Development). This was a newly created post resulting from the re-allocation of management functions when the then Director of

Human Resources left the college (the post of HR Director was reinstated in the following year with a new external appointment). This provided me with a senior management title and active participation in the college management process. The expected next step was to initiate an intervention aimed at improving the effectiveness and finally monitoring the results. However, the reality proved to be somewhat different.

The intention was to use cycles of research in a classic action research design. Following Argyris and Schön's view of action research, the aim of my research was to create involvement with 'practitioners within particular, local practice contexts' (Argyris and Schön, 1991:86). I used repertory grids and construct analysis (Kelly, 1955) as the major part of the first cycle because as Argyris and Schön propose (1991:86) the research must 'take its cues – its questions, puzzles and problems – from the perceptions of the practitioners ... (and it, the research) bounds episodes of research according to the local context' (the ideological assumptions behind repertory grids and construct theory are discussed in chapter eight). This supported the use of repertory grids to explore these perceptions. I interpreted the term practitioners widely to include students, teaching staff, support staff and managers. I also wanted to gather data from other sources, which might indicate the views of other stakeholder groups. The idea was to be eclectic in the use of sources; consequently I looked at newspaper articles, official reports, internal documents and small group interviews.

The research followed Lewin's precept (1946:35) that action research is distinguished from research whose aim is to derive knowledge without considering the value that

knowledge may have in helping people to solve problems. Lewin wanted 'fact-finding' to become part of a plan of action and evaluation of that action. In this way the me, as researcher, and my respondents, co-researchers and recipients of my research reports had the opportunity to examine facts, if my interim reports on my research in progress could be considered as facts, as part of the process of learning about the effects of their actions. Therefore Lewin proposes that actions are set up as part of the research process itself, as a way of experimenting with conditions and effects in definite situations.

Lewin believed that action research should develop better ways of working, as it is the aim of the best research to serve the practical objective of 'improving social management' (1946:36). Action research is linked to the desire to change in a way that will achieve certain objectives that are defined by people in practical situations (1946:37). However, as I gathered data, analysed it and disseminated to some of the people, they resisted the messages, as the analysis pointed to them as being part of the problem. The fact-finding didn't always serve Lewin's function of providing a basis for planning and decision-making. Whilst the cycles of self-evaluation informed my research, they didn't always improve the 'social management'.

5 The First Cycle of Research

This cycle was primarily based on the nineteen Repertory Grid interviews supported by the small group interviews and secondary sources. The objective was to carry out two levels of triangulation: firstly, by exploring different stakeholder groups and their views on the college's effectiveness, and secondly by taking different evidence sources from

the individual groups. This provided a way of addressing the 'credibility' (Leninger, 1994:105) of the interpretive process.

6 Interviews

Small group interviews were used to gather data relating to the participants' feelings and opinions about the college. New and second year students and newly appointed staff were organised into focus groups during their inductions or tutorials. This method was chosen because it fitted into my phenomenological methodology, and could be used to triangulate with the other sources of data. The objective during the focus groups was to create a relaxed atmosphere where the participants would listen to each other's views and thus be encouraged to voice their own opinions, 'the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (Morgan, 1988 p.12). I also suspected that as they were mainly new members of the college community they may have been intimidated and reserved had I conducted one to one interviews. Therefore I did not join or even closely observe the focus groups, instead the data was gathered via written 'post-it' notes.

Here I am considering the small focus group interviews, rather than the Repertory Grid interviews, which are discussed in chapter eight, although some of the underlying assumptions apply to both. Firstly both types of interview enabled me to explore the meanings the respondents/participants expressed about the college, rather than imposing my own constructs upon them via a questionnaire. The alternative method of gathering data would have been to use a questionnaire. This would perhaps have allowed me to

make comparisons with other groups, but I did not think that this was a useful activity at this early stage. However during the second cycle of research the staff satisfaction benchmarking survey did provide many interesting and illuminating comparisons with other colleges.

Secondly the group interviews provided the opportunity for the participants to explore issues too complex to be investigated through quantitative means. Six focus group interviews were used, three exploring the views of students and three those of staff. All six utilised similar three staged semi-structured techniques, whereby the participants were asked to give their positive and negative views about the college as individuals writing alone, and then together in small focus groups within each of the larger induction groups, and finally the small focus groups shared their views and amended them if they wanted to. At the end of the process I had six sets of data to evaluate.

The classic definition of an interview, 'a conversation with a purpose' (Bingham and Moore 1959), expresses well the purpose the interviews had of both providing more data about the stakeholders' views of the college and informing the next cycle of research. It is worth noting that in all five group interviews I held a position of power in the relationship with the participants, either as a lecturer with students, or as a senior member of staff with newly appointed colleagues. Whilst the interviewing process attempted to promote the participants' anonymity and thus encourage revelations, I have to be cognisant of the possibility of power dynamics and therefore the need to maintain an 'interpretive vigilance' (Figueroa and Lopez, 1991) when analysing the results of these interviews.

7 Newspaper Analysis

An analysis of the references to the college in the local newspaper (The County Press) was undertaken as a means of assessing the local community's view of the college in general and its effectiveness in particular. The objective was to examine all the references to the college made during the three-year period 2 February 1999 to 2 February 2001. My assumption was that the articles, editorials and letters would provide a reliable overview of this stakeholder group's perceptions of the college. By examining all the references I hoped to further ensure the validity of the data and its analysis. As The County Press is the only local paper it provides a good reflection of the community's views. It was also illuminating to see how some key news stories about the college, eg the Minister of State's comments, became general descriptors of the college, and through repetition provide a general background view of the college as ineffective.

I also analysed all the references made about the college in the national press, including the educational press, because they both inform other stakeholders' views, and report some important pronouncements of the representative of another major stakeholder, namely the government.

Content analysis is often used to analyse newspapers (Czepiec 1994 and Todd, McKeen and Gallupe 1995). A content analysis of newspapers was chosen because the documents were in the public domain, and they provide a public record and audit trail

for myself and others to revisit and re-examine the evidence. Also the procedure for carrying out the content analysis is clear and provides a reliable and valid method of study. In addition it provides a useful crossover between qualitative and quantitative research, and despite the criticism that 'its theoretical basis is unclear and its conclusions can often be trite' (Silverman 1993:59) it provided me with another useful source of data and a valuable insight into the views of the local community and government

Most of the theoretical models used in newspaper analyses have derived from either Marxism or literary studies ie the content analysis explored either the effects of class on the content or explored the text as literature. Content analyses are based on the theory that repeating certain elements of discourse (in this case words and expressions in newspapers with similar meanings) reveals the concerns or interests of the persons involved. Categorisation commonly uses Sack's membership categorisation analysis (Silverman 1998), but I decided to use my own categories to show how the college was seen through the eyes of the local newspaper. Similar categories of positive and negative content analysis of editorial material in newspapers are used by Wenger, Malone and Bero (2001) in their exploration of cigar-related articles, although they used a seven point Likert -type scale, in contrast to my three-point scale, namely positive, negative and neutral.

8 Ethnography

In retrospect much of the methodology can be categorised as ethnography. I say in retrospect, because that was not the original intention, although there were always some elements of ethnography utilised from the outset of the research. It is perhaps inevitable

that I included an increasing number of these elements because as Taylor (1994:34) states, 'ethnography is, perhaps, the original and quintessential qualitative research method'. As I gathered data from a range of informants, made observations from meetings and written material, I started to draw inferences and construct working hypotheses about the causes of the organisation's ineffectiveness and the effects this had on stakeholders' (particularly the staff) behaviour. It could also be referred to as ethnography as I, as a member of staff, participated actively in the research environment ie the college, but without attempting to structure that environment for the purposes of the research. I was not setting up an experimental environment, but simply engaging with the 'normal' activities. The objective was to depict the activities, perspectives, perceptions and constructs of a group of participants or 'actors' (Taylor, 1994).

Hammersley (1993) takes a less radical approach, arguing that the naïve realism of some ethnographers is not defensible but neither is raw relativism. He further claims that it is acceptable for ethnography to be relevant to social issues but rejects the view that ethnography can be used for radical 'bottom up' change purposes.

'Political action may bring about change (though it will not always be of the kind intended or desired), but research is not an effective way of changing the world (not in any direct and immediate way at least)'

(Hammersley 1993: 147)

Ethnographic research can be judged along with other methods of qualitative research by the criteria of validity and relevance. Hammersley provides a useful definition of validity which can be applied to this thesis:

‘By validity I mean the truth of the claim made. Validity is interpreted in terms of selective representation of reality, with the amount and nature of the evidence that is necessary depending on the type of claim involved, and on judgements about its plausibility credibility and centrality’

(Hammersley 1993: 78)

Unfortunately this criterion’s usefulness is compromised by his immediate assertion that we can never be certain about the validity of these judgements! Relevance relates to the importance of the research topic and the contribution to our knowledge made by the findings of the research. The audience it addresses affects its relevance.

The original ethnographic studies were anthropological. They argued that in order to fully understand a group of people, the researcher must engage in an extended period of observation. Whilst anthropologists were immersing themselves in the cultures of people and societies other than their own, social scientists started to utilise ethnography in their own sub-cultures. As I have been engaged in action research within my own college, I have experienced, lived and been imbued with phenomenological consciousness. Without any conscious effort I participated in the working lives of colleagues and other stakeholders, whilst at the same time observing events, studying documents, interviewing and collecting any other data, which might illuminate my research. Consequently this multi-method form of research mirrors ethnographic studies. Its usefulness in this project is in explaining the social context of the college. Ethnography, according to Reason and Rowan (1981), has to be involved, committed, relevant, intuitive, but above all it has to be alive. It should go beyond mere storytelling to encompass ‘elicitation and documentation of cultural knowledge’ (Taylor, 1994).

However, whilst my research displays many of the same features as an ethnographic study, it does differ from ethnography in some notable ways. In particular my own position is possibly more detached than would be the case in pure ethnography because I use a range of methods developed from mixed methodologies. According to Davies (1999) the ethnographer is part of the picture, and the many ways in which her or his presence impacts on the research need to be recognised, reflected upon, assessed and made available to the reader. I use reflexivity, but I have not placed myself at the centre of the social world that is the college. I was reluctant to place myself at the centre of the research, despite writers such as Coffey (1999:18) arguing for ‘the overt positioning of the researcher self, as an intrinsic part of the fieldwork’. I agree with part of Davies’ (1999) support for a reflexivity that recognises the need for, and possibility of, increased understanding of the social world, which is the proper goal of ethnographic work. However, for Davies, ethnographies can and should produce valid and generalisable knowledge of social realities, and here I am not sure that I can make such strong claims for this research. I do believe that I have revealed some deep understanding and knowledge about the college; from this it is hopefully not too presumptuous to claim that some generalised knowledge has been found.

Finally, although I have conformed to the ideal of ethnography as a research discipline based upon culture as an organising concept, and I used a mix of both observational and interviewing tactics in the respondents’ natural world, in their workplace, I have not been in the role of ‘naïve visitor’ (Mariampolski, 1999:79). He claims that the power of ethnography is that the researcher ‘essentially becomes a naïve visitor in that world by

engaging respondents in the course of daily life.’ I do not consider myself to be a ‘naïve visitor’!

Having distanced myself from some of the claims made for ethnography, it would be true to say that my research does conform to the four characteristics itemised by Taylor (1994:36)

- ‘gathering data from a range of sources, e.g. conversations, observations, documents;
- studying behaviour in everyday contexts rather than experimental conditions;
- using an unstructured approach to data gathering in the early stages, so that key issues can emerge gradually through analysis;
- comprising an in-depth study of one or two situations’.

My only real divergence from these characteristics was from the third. Indeed although I was willing to gather data from a wide range of sources, the early stages were quite structured, with the planned use of repertory grid interviews.

9 Practitioner-based research in FE (and other organisations): realities and problems

There is apparently a growing enthusiasm for research in further education. In addition to that carried out by university-based researchers, there is a growing body of research being carried out by lecturers and others based within colleges, and there are now a number of journals dedicated to such research. However, the growth of this research has been severely curtailed due to four main ‘difficulties’ according to Culham (2001). He

claims that these difficulties vary among colleges and practitioners, but the 'most common are:

- lack of time and funding
- no 'active' research culture within FE
- no 'value' of research within colleges
- few opportunities for dissemination'

(Culham 2001:27-28)

Whilst I encountered some of these 'difficulties', I found that the major barrier to action research (which is, I believe, often the most appropriate research method), to be a combination of cultural and management factors relating to the research itself, and in particular its findings. These problems are not inherently greater or more likely to occur in FE colleges, but they are highlighted because of the expectation that research and an educational institution would naturally go together, like peaches and cream if not love and marriage. There is a presumption that the difficulties can be overcome if only, as Evans (1998:17) states, 'the research and development activity must have status, be valued and have a clear location in the college's strategy in order for it to realise its purpose.' However, this assumes a commonality of interest between the researcher/practitioner and politically powerful groups, which in my experience was absent and militated against it. As colleges have gradually but perceptibly been moved away from their public-sector roots, with a corresponding public service ethos being shared by the vast majority of its employees, there has been an increasing managerial/staff divide. Managers are likely to be less often former teacher practitioners who have been promoted from within the lecturing profession and consequently

accepted as co-workers by other staff. More often they are professional managers brought in from other sectors, but even those who are promoted from within the lecturing ranks are increasingly seen as being removed from their lecturer colleagues. The consequence of this is that the shared values are less in evidence and the research findings of the action-researcher/practitioner may not be welcomed.

The nature of this decline in shared values can best be exemplified by the breaking of the previously held psychological contract, described by Arnold, Cooper and Robinson (1996) as 'an individual's belief regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party...A belief that some form of a promise has been made and that the terms and conditions of the contract have been accepted by both partners'. The nature of this psychological contract in FE was explained by Goffee and Scase (1995) as 'job security in return for organisational commitment, job progression in return for loyalty and merit.' As colleges have developed into public-private hybrid organisations, the 'job for life' condition of the psychological contract has evaporated, and uncertainties within a more rigorous financial framework have become the prevailing background system. The way in which FE teachers' work has changed can be described in general terms as 'the former (state) refers to a long-term relationship based on trust and mutual respect'; whereas the latter 'results from changes principally directed towards cost-cutting for increased competitiveness', (Arnold, Cooper and Robinson 1996). Perhaps this overstates the degree of change and over-emphasises the former degree of 'trust and mutual respect', but it does reflect a perceived breach of the psychological contract. For many teachers, the previously vaguely defined job role has now become a more tightly controlled and

measured job description, complete with targets, appraisals and individual accountability for performance. As Arnold, Cooper and Robinson (1996) put it 'the deal many employees thought they had with their employer has turned out to be worth less than the paper it wasn't written on'.

This change in the psychological contract can be contrasted with the more obviously market-led private sector organisations whereby employees and managers may have different objectives, but they are clearly delineated and the objectives of the organisations can be generally agreed.

The clear difficulty for the action-researcher/practitioner in a college occurs, as in my case, when the findings of the research do not conform to the prevailing constructs of the college's management, particularly the Principal. This problem with action research is not something identified in my literature review, where it is assumed that the objectives of the organisation and of the researcher are congruent, and that there is a shared desire to identify a problem, its causes and solutions. Whereas Hughes and Robertson (1999:9) stated optimistically that 'good analytical research can help colleges find ways to meet the challenges of the standards agenda', my experience is that the college as exemplified by its senior management may deny the value of that 'good analytical research' if it identifies them as part of the problem. This presents a real issue for the manager as a researcher; are these two roles mutually achievable or incompatible? The next chapter explores these issues further.

Chapter 3

The Researcher's Stance And an autobiographical note

My epistemology and ontology is qualitative and non-positivist, consequently I do not accept the common objection to action research, namely that a scientific researcher studying a society (in this case a college) has an obligation to do no more than study, and to interfere as little as possible. This is necessary, according to the positivists, not only to ensure a minimum of contamination, but also to prevent the researcher taking sides in any disputes within that society. This approach is impossible for the action researcher who must attempt interventions as part of the research cycle, and must therefore 'contaminate' and attempt to modify behaviour. However, what is the ethical position of the researcher who wishes to take sides in the internal disputes and who wants to change attitudes and, is it possible for me to simply record and remain silent? The answer to the second part of that question is of course no. As a member of the college and its wider community, I did not wish to write *about* an organisation and its people, but *for* an organisation and its people. In that sense my own personality and stance was only a means to an end.

This debate is at the heart of the dilemma in social sciences, between the empirical scientists who crave the respectability of the pure sciences and those who believe that this craving is a chimera. This is not just a dispute about professional ethics, but is really an argument about epistemology. According to Ascherson (1995:9) 'one side defends the idea that 'facts speak', and that the scholar must therefore listen to them in

impartial silence. The other side retorts that facts say almost anything the investigator wants, and that what he hears in the silence is no more than the mutter of his own unacknowledged prejudices. The student is part of the study, acting inside the situation rather than peering at it through some imaginary window, and to admit that fact is the precondition of knowledge.' I am firmly of the second view; I am part of the study.

Providing a short autobiographical note is essential for this action researcher, if only to give the reader an understanding of any possible bias, or should I say degree of cognition I may have! Writing this is not something I feel comfortable about, but here are what may be some pertinent facts. I have worked full time in six colleges of further education and part time in a seventh, during the past twenty-six years; teaching and managing at all levels up to that of Assistant Principal. Following redundancy and a year working as a management consultant and part time lecturer, I took up a full time teaching post at the Isle of Wight College in September 1997. In September 1999 I became a senior manager again, with responsibility for Human Resource Development, whilst maintaining a half-time teaching commitment. In April 2001 I exchanged my HRD role for the newly created post of Co-ordinator of Higher Education courses. The relevance of this experience is twofold. Firstly it helped me to identify that the college had a 'problem', and one that was singular and interesting enough to warrant researching. Secondly, my management positions in the Isle of Wight College provided me with access to important research opportunities, and in theory the chance to make meaningful interventions, which would 'solve the problem'.

When I started at the college colleagues assured me that it was special, or different from other colleges and had certain features that made it unique. Initially I was sceptical because all the colleges I had worked in were different and special and there was no particular level of uniqueness that I could measure or even immediately identify. However, as the college's ineffectiveness became apparent (see chapter six, The Isle of Wight college in Context), and identified itself as a prime source for research, the possible special factors, if not the uniqueness often claimed, became more apparent. These factors as additional causes of the ineffectiveness, and management's failure to fully acknowledge or deal with them became a developing theme in my research and perhaps provide some truths that can be usefully applied elsewhere. As a senior manager in three of my previous colleges, it would have been easy for me to quickly assume that I could bring my experience to bear on the college and identify the problem and propose a solution. That I resisted this temptation was not due to any false modesty, but to a genuine perplexity about why so many of the college's stakeholders found it to be ineffective. This research, I believe, provides many of the answers, and may point the way to the solutions.

My final hope is that the research has been carried out with an open enquiring mind and not from the perspective of a cynical ex Assistant Principal who feels he knows best. I write this sentence in the knowledge that the sections on leadership may be open to such a negative interpretation.

The Writing Style

The choice of writing style and in particular the choice of the first person singular was a novel experience for me. I also found it a difficult and strange experience. As a reflexive researcher, a role I also found a challenge, I endeavoured to remain self-conscious as an author, because the writing up was not just a technical matter of reporting on objective facts and events, but also was an expression of my power as a participant in the research, and as an interpreter of events. Quantitative research writing conventionally uses a distant and impersonal style, with the formal use of the third person, but even when I have used quantitative data, as with the Staff Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey, the analysis has involved personal reflexivity.

One aspect of writing up the final report was the difficulty in reconciling the need to write within an acceptable academic framework whilst also using the narrative style suited to what is partially an ethnographic study. Making a distinction between the research method, data, analysis and discussion is difficult, as is distinguishing between narrative and analysis. In the end I decided on a compromise which both exemplified the organisation and systematic analysis (by displaying a degree of distance on my part and imposing what is hopefully a coherent, analytical framework), whilst at the same time including narrative stories within the text and making it explicit that the narrative is itself analytic and represents positive personal choices about what to include.

Finally, it is important to mention my attitude towards some of the key participants in the study. This can be a major issue for ethnography if the researcher is unsympathetic

towards the participants. As a member of the college's community I naturally started with views about some of the participants in the research, and luckily remained broadly sympathetic towards them. Unlike a full-scale ethnographic study I was not so close to the participants that the issues of my motive and morality became an issue. It helped me to use a mixed methodology that included quantitative data thus allowing a more detached approach. Nevertheless some of the techniques including the repertory grid interviews involved closer contact with the participants who were also my work colleagues. These continuing personal relationships carried extra ethical responsibility for me. Hopefully these relationships and my sympathy or lack of sympathy for the participants in the research does not affect the validity of the research. This validity is reinforced by the triangulation and use of multiple methods.

The Initial Research Cycle

Chapter Four

Organisational Effectiveness

1 Introduction

The examination of effectiveness is central to the understanding of any organisation, and it is a concept that can be viewed in many different ways. A college of further education provides particular challenges, as it is essentially a service provider, which straddles the private and public sectors and has to deal with the tensions and paradoxes implicit in such a position.

I took as my starting point two apparently straightforward definitions of effectiveness:

Effectiveness: the ability of an organisation to meet the demands and expectations of its various stakeholders, those individuals or groups with influence over the business. Sometimes known as ‘doing the right thing’.

Thompson (2001:12)

Effectiveness, organisational and managerial: the ability to satisfy the demands of the range of constituencies inside and outside the organisation so that continued support in terms of resources such as labour, custom, investment, supplies and legal approval is obtained and the organisation enabled to survive into the long term.

Watson (2002:467)

Organisations are composed of individuals acting together to achieve a common purpose. The boundaries of organisations may be delineated legally, by economics or by a shared moral imperative. A college is likely to be defined by all three. The challenge is to identify these individuals and to allocate them to comprehensible stakeholder groups. These groups need not share a common purpose. Indeed it can be argued (Cameron 1986:539) 'that the most effective organisations are also those characterized by paradoxes i.e. contradictions, simultaneous opposites, and incompatibilities'. Cameron further claims that the literature contains many explanations of what makes firms effective, although they often use terms such as excellent, high quality, productive, healthy or possessing vitality, as 'proxies for the concept of organisational effectiveness' (Cameron 1986:539). Despite the many terms used and the difficulty in agreeing a definition of organisational effectiveness, it has been a central concept in organisational theory. This has been identified as one of the common themes in the literature according to Goodman and Penning (1980) and Cameron and Whetten (1983). Consequently despite the attempts by some authors to dispense with the term effectiveness, it is clear that it remains central, and that major stakeholders are continually making judgments about effectiveness.

Although it may be generally agreed that it is impossible to obtain a consensus on the best set of indicators of effectiveness (Cameron 1986), and this appears particularly so in 'non-profit' organisations (Rojas 2000). Nevertheless, some of the earliest models of effectiveness were goal-based (Etzioni 1960). Despite these being deemed unsatisfactory due to the selection of inadequate goals (Mohr 1983) and the different values and preferences held by the various stakeholders (Cameron 1986), it is instructive

to find that the college's major provider of funds, The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) uses this model to evaluate college effectiveness as shown in Chapter Six. Cameron (1986:541) claims that 'criteria are based on the values and preferences of individuals, and no specifiable construct boundaries exist. Constructs, by definition, have no objective referent. They are mental abstractions used by individuals to interpret their own reality'. Cameron's explanation and use of the term 'construct' provided a link that encouraged me to use Construct Theory and Repertory Grid interviews to explore the values and preferences held by the college's stakeholders. Another consensus claimed by Whetten (1986) is that different models of effectiveness are useful for research in different circumstances, and that the circumstances in which each is most useful can be identified. Cameron and Whetten (1983) provide guidelines for assessing effectiveness models in the form of seven critical questions. These questions can be summarized as:

- 1 From whose perspective is effectiveness being assessed?
- 2 On what domain of activity is the assessment focused?
- 3 What level of analysis is being used?
- 4 What is the purpose for assessing effectiveness
- 5 What time frame is being employed?
- 6 What types of data are being used for assessments?
- 7 What is the referent against which effectiveness is judged?

(Cameron 1986:542)

Cameron (1984) and Smith (1998) both describe eight commonly used models of organisational effectiveness. Of these Cameron claims that the Strategic Constituencies

Model, whereby ‘all strategic constituencies are at least minimally satisfied’, is the most useful ‘when constituencies have powerful influence on the organisation, and it has to respond to their demands.’ (Cameron 1984:276). This is the case with a college, which is greatly influenced by a number of powerful constituencies of stakeholders. This model, more usually referred to as the multiple constituency model is considered to be the most appropriate one for exploring effectiveness in a not for profit organisation (Rojas 2000).

This model has also been selected as it provides a framework within which Cameron and Whetten’s seven critical questions may be answered. A college has a number of identifiable stakeholder groups and it is their perceptions of the college’s effectiveness, which is deemed vital to the college’s success. In terms of the domain of activity being assessed this may be considered in two aspects. One relates to the effectiveness in achieving the goals set by the funding bodies, ‘how well objectives are met’ (Thomas 1990:177). In a college this means:

- Growth rate, and how fast the rate can grow without affecting the outcomes as measured by results
- Satisfied customers, and what contributes to this satisfaction. Again this supports the use of the multiple constituency model.
- Achievement – of government targets.
- Recruitment, both in terms of numbers and the quality of the students

The other aspect emphasises the importance of the stakeholders in the process of determining the level of effectiveness. Consequently a purely output based model would

be less appropriate. They represent the reason for the college's existence and meeting their needs is of a different order than the needs satisfied by other goods and services. Customers (students) do not have a second chance in education. Also education is a 'merit good', because all of society benefits from a well-educated population.

There is no attempt in this research to use longitudinal comparisons because the emphasis is on how the stakeholders' perceptions and actions affect the college's effectiveness during the time of this research. Similarly the data used for assessing effectiveness concentrates on process issues ie the determinants of effectiveness, rather than on the indicators of effectiveness. I do not claim that the multiple constituency model is a perfect model, but only that for a college it satisfies Cameron and Whetten's criteria. Perhaps the best justification for using this model is provided by Cameron (1986) where he argues that those organisations that achieved the highest levels of effectiveness scores were also those that satisfied the most separate constituency group expectations.

2 EFQM

I considered using one of the major models for measuring effectiveness that are increasingly used by organisations. Of these the most notable methodology is the Business Excellence Model, developed by the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management). The model gives a view of all the organisation's activities, and not only examines the financial and customer service outputs, but also attempts to link these to the internal processes and resource inputs. The starting point for most organisations is to

conduct a self-assessment against the model that results in a prioritised action plan. This approach would appear to fit in well with my action research framework. However the fit with the EFQM model proved to be less appropriate due to a number of reasons.

Firstly the initial self-assessment required organisational and management agreement and support, and these were not forthcoming. Secondly the processes and consequent actions were likely to require the leadership and management to change not only their method of managing, but more fundamentally, their central constructs concerning their perceptions of the college. These changes were revealed by the repertory grid interviews to be unlikely, and emphasise the importance of organisational learning, which is examined later in this chapter. The use of repertory grid data does not fit comfortably into the EFQM model, and this according to Cameron and Whetten's (1985) criteria for assessing effectiveness models limited EFQM's usefulness to this research.

It could be argued that the EFQM model with its private sector origins gives insufficient recognition to the political environment within which a college operates and gives insufficient regard to public accountability, and provides too rigid a framework to explore some of the deeper process issues, notably the psychological contracts between employees and managers in a college. Although the model considers customer service outputs it doesn't allow for the importance of stakeholders such as the local community and government who are not traditional customers, and again this would limit the model's usefulness according to Cameron and Whetten's evaluation criteria. The importance and nature of these stakeholders and their effects on the college's processes

are different to their equivalents in the private sector. Similarly, neither are the students synonymous with private market customers as although they can be considered as consumers, but are not always paying customers. However, they are not the only consumers, society as a whole is a consumer of a college's outputs, and students themselves have another function as an input into the college's processes. The EFQM model is perhaps most useful when used as part of a longitudinal study or as a benchmarking exercise with 'best practice' equivalent organisations, but time was limited and there was a lack of suitable benchmarking data, and these factors also limit the model's usefulness according to Cameron and Whetten's (1985) assessment criteria.

The EFQM model possibly concentrates too much on business results and quality control (Deming 1986, Crosby 1979, quoted in Nabitz et al 2001). This is not to deny the usefulness of such a model, but it was thought to be less helpful in this study, which is more concerned with processes rather than results. A report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2000:11) commissioned by the Cabinet Office concluded that, 'the Excellence Model is the most comprehensive of all the models and is viewed as an over-arching framework within which other schemes and tools can co-exist'. However, it also claims that, 'The challenge for the public sector since it is not driven by profits and market success in the same way (as the private sector), is to use such approaches to promote cost efficiency and effectiveness within the specific public sector environment of regulation and multiple stakeholder needs and wants' (2000:12). Nevertheless aspects of the EFQM model have been acknowledged in this research, in particular the importance of management and leadership as a 'cornerstone of organisational effectiveness' (Mullins 2002), and the connection in the model between leadership,

processes, including learning and innovation and the achievement of key performance results.

I also considered using SERVQUAL as a model for exploring the college's effectiveness because it is based on a disconfirmation paradigm (Buttle 1996), and I wished to explore stakeholder attitudes. SERVQUAL's focuses on process orientation and gap analysis between perception and expectation and provides a measure of the differences between customer expectations and perceptions of the service provided (Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry 1998). This provides a potentially useful approach for this research, but there are criticisms relating to the value and meaning of the gap (Babakus and Boller 1992, Churchill and Surprenant 1982, Iacobucci 1994).

The use of the large-scale employee survey (the FEDA survey) is supported by Macpherson (2001) in his survey of performance measurement in not-for-profit and public-sector organisations, where he states that employee satisfaction is recognised as a leading indicator, which reliably foretells customer satisfaction. He further claims that as all data are flawed, there are no absolute values and indicators can be manipulated for subjective reasons, then great care must be used in their selection.

3 Sources of Effectiveness

Waterman, Peters and Phillips (1980) state that 'organisational effectiveness stems from the interaction of several factors – some not especially obvious and some under analysed'. They show that a multiplicity of factors influence seven identifiable

elements, a division, which they admit, is 'to some extent arbitrary, but has the merit of acknowledging the complexity identified in the research and segmenting it into manageable parts'. These seven elements are strategy, structure, system, skills, subordinate goals, staff and style. This approach has the benefit of providing a clear view of the organisation whilst still recognizing the complex interrelationships.

Morgan (1997:67) emphasizes the nature of organisations as mechanisms for conversions or transformation, 'using the image of an organism in constant exchange with the environment, we are encouraged to take an open and flexible view of organisation. We can recognise that so long as key processes are functioning in an effective manner, everything is going well.'

Much greater complexity is acknowledged by Handy (1985) who identifies over sixty variables that impinge on an organisation's effectiveness! He warns against reductionism, the disentangling of each variable in turn, particularly when this is done in order to provide a patent cure, which can be sold by consultants to the desperate, and the gullible. Instead he emphasises, like Waterman, Peters and Phillips (1980), the complexity and interrelationships inherent in organisations. How we make sense of such complexity and visualise an organisation can determine our view of effectiveness and the change interventions required to achieve it. In acknowledging these different images of organisations, Morgan (1997) claims we must beware of falling into the relativist post-modernist trap of claiming that all views of the world are equally valid and appropriate.

Using a definition of effectiveness that utilises the concepts of stakeholders and their expectations raises a number of interesting questions, which exemplify the particular nature of its public/private nature. Firstly, who are the customers? Are they the students, government funding agencies, taxpayers, local industry or society as a whole? This multi-stakeholder approach will be further examined in the College in Context chapter. Secondly, what are the customer requirements, and how can we identify their needs and perceptions of how closely they are matched by the college's provisions? Thirdly, what are the value added features that best suit the needs of the customers?

4 Characteristics of Effective Organisations

There are many models which attempt to define and explain the characteristics of high performing organisations (Baguley 1994), which define effectiveness in terms of ensuring that the product or service generated is available for the customer when and where required. Similarly, Drucker (1989) focuses on effective management as the key, using an allegory between building a cathedral and managing a company, he proposes that a manager would be a visionary who can take responsibility for a project in its entirety, and must direct the vision and efforts of all the team towards a common goal. The stonecutter who recognised that, in cutting the stone, he took responsibility for what the stone was to be eventually used for ie building a cathedral, was in Drucker's view an effective manager. Peters and Waterman's (1982) prescription for effectiveness supports Drucker's as they agree that organisations must never lose sight of their values and purpose, whilst also identifying characteristics that are systems and resource based,

focusing on customers and high sales turnover. However, their model places the greatest importance on effectiveness as being highly customer-focused (Peters 1992).

Other models suggest that the effective organisation is one that achieves its goals; these should be measurable, achievable and time-limited. Rather than outline or attempt to utilise all the models, the intention here is to concentrate upon what will be shown to be the most appropriate for the college of further education: the multiple constituency approach model.

This model accepts that there are many groups who have valid claims and rights to a college's operations and outputs. These stakeholders are vitally important in determining a college's effectiveness. The model reveals the importance of the process of achieving effectiveness, in addition to the achievement of outputs appropriate to the stakeholders' needs. During this research, the stakeholders were taken to be: Students, National Government and its agencies (notably the FEFC), Local Community and employees. These groups affect the college and influence its objectives and operations. Assumptions are made by organisations about the needs of the stakeholders, yet it is not obvious what these needs really are. Nevertheless these difficulties do not prevent individuals and organisations, particularly government agencies, making assumptions about the needs of other stakeholder groups, particularly the needs of students. In so doing, government departments often confuse effectiveness with efficiency, as this matches their remit to control public expenditure. Some of this confusion arises from the nature of a public service organisation that has been overlaid with some aspects of the private sector, and the difficulty it has in identifying an obvious, identifiable

consumer who is also the paying customer. Students, and to a lesser extent the community and local industry, are the consumers of the college's services, yet it is taxpayers via the government and its agencies who are the paying customers, and these various stakeholders can have conflicting objectives. The identification of the consumer is further complicated by the way many college employees and government agencies view students as inputs to be transformed into 'better' outputs. Powerful professional stakeholders such as teachers and FEFC inspectors often conceive the value of the service, without testing their constructs with the customers or clients. This can result in a false view of what the core competencies of the organisations need to be. Many researchers (Cameron 1986, Johnson and Scholes 2001) identify the essential point that value is a relative rather than an absolute measure.

5 Measures of Effectiveness

If effectiveness is essentially 'doing the right thing', then resources need to be allocated in a college to those activities which satisfy the needs, expectations and priorities of the various stakeholders. It is often suggested (Thompson 2001) that the objectives of not-for-profit organisations are usually expressed in terms of resource efficiency because of the difficulty in quantifying their real purpose. As a result, the measures of success of a college used by the FEFC may not be clearly related to its real mission and purpose. Effectiveness often involves qualitative assessments, as the measures concern perceptions of outcomes and the variables being measured are mostly used for external comparisons across the further education sector, rather than being internal to the organisation. For these reasons it is generally more difficult to measure effectiveness,

and consequently some colleges will need to rely on their own informal indicators rather than formal measures. Some government agencies particularly the FEFC and the Further Education Council for Wales concentrate on college resource efficiencies simply because they are easier to deal with, and in so doing the real interests of other stakeholders may be overlooked. Their approaches and a variation from the USA are examined in the following section. This is followed with a review of some research undertaken by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), and concludes with some observations from an accounting perspective.

6 The FEFC Approach

The FEFC (1997) uses six Performance Indicators that they claim ‘focus on the main activities of colleges of interest to the Council, colleges and others.’ The stated aim of the indicators is that they should be defined to allow reliable comparisons among institutions and over time, that they be calculated from data already collected for other purposes, and that they should include in the FEFC’s estimation the following ‘key areas of activity in colleges: recruitment of students, students’ commitment to their learning programmes, students’ achievements particularly in relation to the national targets for education, and training and value for money.’

Table 4.1 shows the performance indicators which the FEFC used and includes their interpretations of effectiveness and efficiency.

Figure 4.1 Titles of performance indicators

Indicator	Previous title	Current main title	Subtitle
PI 1	Achievement of funding target – an indicator of college effectiveness	Achievement of funding target	An indicator of the degree to which a college has achieved funding targets
PI 2	Student number trends – an indicator of college responsiveness	Change in student numbers	An indicator of the level of change in student enrolments at a college
PI 3	Student continuation – an indicator of programme effectiveness	In-year retention rates	An indicator of the effectiveness of a college’s teaching, and guidance and support processes, as measured by the retention of students on their learning programmes
PI 4	Achievement of qualifications – an indicator of student achievements	Achievement rates	An indicator of the effectiveness of a college in enabling students to attain their learning goals
PI 5	Attainment of NVQs or equivalent – an indicator of contribution to national targets	Contribution to the national targets	An indicator of the number of students attaining one of the national targets for education and training by achieving an NVQ or equivalent at the appropriate level
PI 6	Average level of funding (ALF) – an indicator of value for money	Out-turn average level of funding (ALF)	An indicator of a college’s cost-efficiency as measured by average funding per unit

These six performance indicators have three main purposes according to the FEFC:

- To enable colleges to compare their achievements with those of equivalent institutions

- To provide information to the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE), Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), the Council and the general public as part of the accountability for spending public funds
- To enable colleges and the Council to monitor changes in performance at each college over time

These six performance indicators are vitally important in determining a college's perceived success. They are also particularly illuminating in this context as they use the word effectiveness twice, stating that 'achievement of funding target (is an) indicator of a college's effectiveness', and that 'student continuation (is an) indicator of programme effectiveness' (Figure 4.1). Both of these measures of effectiveness reveal the FEFC's prime preoccupation with achieving value for money, rather than meeting the needs of my preferred model of effectiveness, which concentrates upon matching the service features, including outputs and processes, to the requirements of the different stakeholder groups. The FEFC's presumption is that its stakeholder requirements are the same as those of the prime stakeholders i.e. students as customers and consumers. As the FEFC is by far the largest source of income, providing, on average, 74% of college funds (1998), it unsurprisingly concentrates upon financial targets and cost-effectiveness. This is clearly expressed by the Council (1999) when it states that the performance indicators, 'provide information to the Department of Education and Employment, Training and Enterprise, the Council and the general public as part of the accountability for spending public funds.'

The Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW), a more recent body than the FEFC, also attempts to assess what it refers to as 'institutional effectiveness' (1998) by assessing the following elements:

1 Educational effectiveness

Institution's mission

Curriculum

Planning and management

Responsiveness to employers

Responsiveness to the community

Educational outcomes

Standards achieved by students

Quality of teaching and learning

Services to students

Educational management

Management of resources (including space utilisation and the deployment and development of staff in relation to curricular needs)

Management of quality and self-assessment

2 Functional effectiveness

Strategic and operational management

Strategic planning

Structure and organisation

Financial management, Audit control

Physical infrastructure and estates/space management

Human resources, MIS

Administration

Governance

As with its English counterpart, the FEFCW has concentrated on resource efficiencies because they are easier to measure, and deal objectively with their need to ensure that they are accountable for public funds. Meanwhile effectiveness is likely to involve subjective measures concerning stakeholders' perceptions which are more difficult to measure, yet as will be argued later are much more important.

7 An American Approach

The USA equivalents to colleges of further education are community colleges, and they have identified their own performance indicators and effectiveness models. These vary from college to college because of state, regional and institutional differences. One attempt to identify '13 core indicators that could be used by a college to assess its effectiveness,' has been made by the Community College Round Table (1993). These are set out below and form an interesting comparison with the English and Welsh indicators:

- 1 Student goal attainment
- 2 Fall-to-fall persistence
- 3 Degree completion rates
- 4 Placement rate in the workforce
- 5 Employer assessment of students
- 6 Transfers

- 7 Performance after transfer
- 8 Success in subsequent, related coursework
- 9 Demonstration of critical literary skills
- 10 Demonstration of citizenship skills
- 11 Client assessment of programs and services
- 12 Responsiveness to community needs
- 13 Participation rate in service area

These thirteen indicators do attempt to identify and measure the different stakeholder groups' perceptions and are less concerned with financial accountability and resource efficiency.

8 An overview of recent research into college effectiveness

The Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) has been carrying out a research project entitled 'Improving College Effectiveness' (1998) which is still continuing, but has already produced some interim findings namely that, 'top of the list is that effective institutions 'keep their eye on the ball' – the centrality of teaching and learning as the focus of effectiveness and improvement. Leadership and vision and creating a real 'learning organisation' also emerge as common factors behind effectiveness and improvement.'

The project also underlines the difficulty in identifying a common definition of effectiveness. As the authors acknowledge, 'unlike the schools sector – where qualification outcomes, either as raw targets or moderated by value-added factors, are

more widely accepted as measures of effectiveness – the diversity of FE means that we have many more dimensions to our understanding of effectiveness, such as social and employment skills.’ They further highlight, ‘the lack of clarity between concepts of effectiveness in the sector: can a college which has excellent examination and assessment performance, but which is also financially ‘at risk’, be described as effective?’

Another FEDA research project (1999) illuminates the needs of the core stakeholders (students) in the report ‘What makes a satisfied student?’ This is based on a survey of 23,000 students from more than 60 further education colleges, and shows that students are most concerned with the quality of teaching. The survey consistently shows strong links between students’ satisfaction, the quality of teaching and the sense each has that he or she is on the right course and is being supported by staff. The survey’s evidence offers an interesting contrast and complement to the FEFC’s performance indicators of effectiveness and financial accountability of the effectiveness of college outputs such as students’ achievements and destinations. The research concludes that, ‘for those students whose primary educational goals are not concerned with achieving a qualification or progression to employment or higher education, measures of their relative satisfaction with their experience are likely to provide a more easily obtainable guide to the effectiveness of the education they receive than assessments of societal impact. More generally, tracking student perceptions over time can offer early warning signals of perceived decline in the quality of provision, before it has a chance to work through in the form of a deterioration in levels of achievement.’

This theme of student perceptions is central to this research and is explored particularly in the chapters on the small group and repertory grid interviews. A clear survey of different measures of effectiveness is provided by Smith (1998) where he identified the problems of measuring intangible outputs in service industries. The most common financial accountancy measures such as Return on Investment and Z Scores are examined, as is the '3 Es' framework:

- efficiency – concerned with the utilisation of equipment and the efficiency of the workforce
- economy – concerned with the optimum use of resources, and
- effectiveness – concerned with the achievement of outcomes

However, whilst this framework generates a host of useful non-financial indicators it fails according to Smith (1998:37) in three important regards:

- 'it does not help in the measurement of qualitative non-financials
- it provides no indication of the variable weighting which would allow an integrated overall measure to be formulated, and
- its focus is undeniably internal, in circumstances where we require a method which also reflects competitiveness and external conditions'

One solution is proposed by Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1993) who propose a balanced scorecard, which demands that organisations be perceived both internally and externally:

- Financial – how do we look to shareholders?
- Customers – how do they see us?
- Internal – at what must we excel?

- Innovation and learning – how do we continue to improve and create value?

The balanced scorecard has the virtue that much of the data would be readily available to a college, particularly as we can substitute the FEFC for shareholders in the first element. However, it still requires judgements to be made in the light of different local conditions. All of these proposed solutions to the measurement of effectiveness presume knowledge of the customers' requirements. Once these assumptions are made by an external agency, it becomes one stakeholder group setting both the agenda and the measurements of effectiveness, which then impact upon the other stakeholders.

9 Double-loop Learning

In this research I intend to take a radically different approach to the development of effectiveness by utilising Argyris and Schon's (1974) approach to learning as a process of discovery of a problem, followed by the development of a solution, and finally monitoring the implementation of the solution in order to enhance its effectiveness. Hopefully this process, including reflections on its limitations, may lead to new insights. The individual and group nature of the research concentrates on people who are significantly influenced by the context in which the research developed. This contrasts starkly with the FEFC's superficially scientific-positivist analyses. This different learning approach was developed by Argyris and Schon (1978). This looks at how organisations learn and how the pursuit of effectiveness occurs through measuring, comparisons and the correction of deviations from the standards.

This basic model is referred to by Argyris and Schon as 'single-loop' learning; an approach followed by the FEFC and other government educational agencies where it is implicit in the models of effectiveness that they adopt. The focus is on ensuring that current targets and performance indicators are met, often with the minimum of resources. Consequently such single-loop learning is really concerned with efficiency rather than effectiveness. A college that adopts this approach is scanning an external environment delineated by the FEFC, and measuring itself against these externally set standards.

Single-loop learning is often present when goals, values, frameworks and strategies are taken for granted. The emphasis is on 'techniques and making techniques more efficient' (Usher and Bryant, 1989:87). The reason for this single-loop learning according to Argyris and Schon (1974) is because people have mental maps that guide how they plan, review and implement their actions. Moreover it is these mental maps that guide people's actions rather than the theories they explicitly espouse, and that people are rarely aware of the maps or theories they do use (Argyris 1980). Consequently it is possible to distinguish between theories-in use which tend to be tacit yet govern actual behaviour, and espoused theories which convey to others what we would like them to think we do.

Argyris (1980) makes the case that effectiveness results from developing congruence between theory-in-use and espoused theory. He claimed that nearly all the participants in his research operated from theories-in-use that were consistent with single-loop learning (Argyris et al 1985). This thesis displays the use of double-loop learning as I

expected the problem to be related to the unfulfilled objectives of the main stakeholders, notably the customers and consumers, and that once I had uncovered these objectives it would be a relatively simple matter to develop a strategy for improvement. This would have been an intervention in the classic action research sense, which once enacted would have resulted in improved effectiveness. Instead, as is shown in the second cycle, my research suggests that the causes of the ineffectiveness go deeper, with a major problem created by the key stakeholders, notably consecutive principals and their senior managers, having espoused theories that are odds with their theories-in use.

10 Towards a local solution

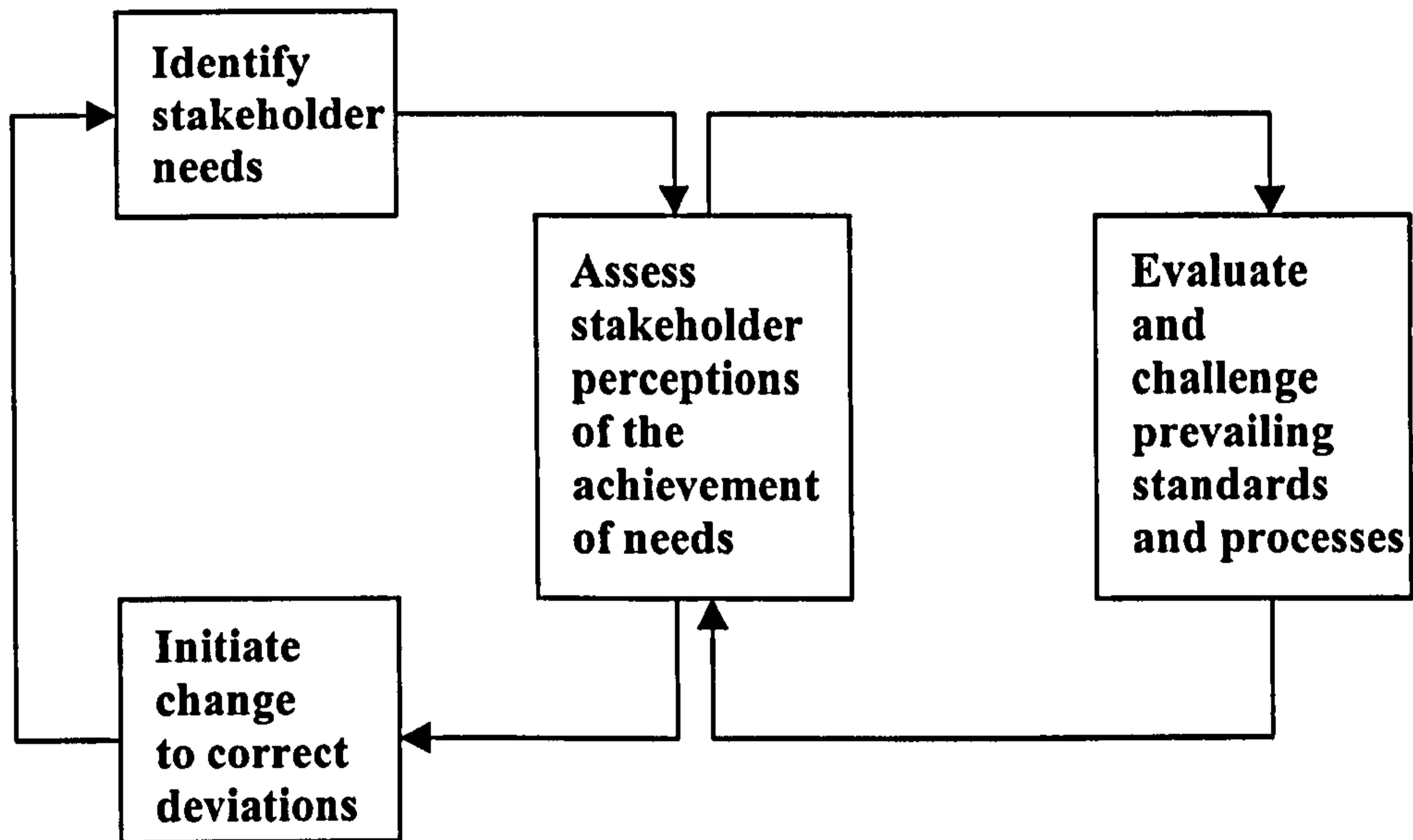
The proposal was to instigate a process of research which will investigate and identify the stakeholder groups' perceptions of their own needs, compare these with their own evaluations of how far the college has met these needs, use this knowledge to challenge the prevailing standards and processes, initiate changes to correct any deviations, before once more measuring and monitoring their perceptions. This adaptation of Argyris and Schon's (1987) double-loop learning model is set out below, whereby it is the type of learning that is so important. Garratt (1987) argues that double-loop learning provides the litmus test of a learning organisation. While single-loop learning would have involved me in attempting to correct any revealed errors, adjust or refine some ineffective activity, with double-loop learning I was attempting to learn how to learn and how to challenge the assumptions underpinning the college's system. Therefore whereas single-loop learning might involve knowing how to implement a process such as staff turnover and satisfaction, double-loop learning would involve understanding the

reasons for the levels of staff turnover and employee satisfaction, questioning these assumptions and considering ways in which they might effectively be changed.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is a link between organisational learning and the EFQM model that emphasises the fundamental concepts of leadership and constancy of purpose with continuous learning improvement and innovation in the achievement of effectiveness. Argyris (1980) suggests that increased effectiveness in decision-making and the better acceptance of failures and mistakes results from developing congruence between Theory-in-use and Espoused theory. The building of a creative and a learning organisation can be considered as a prerequisite for business excellence (Evans and Lindsay 1999). Business excellence in this case is the method of working in the college that results in levels of stakeholders' satisfaction so ensuring its long term success. The connections between leadership organisational learning and effectiveness are explored further in Chapter Five.

Figure 4.2

Towards a local solution



This research assumes that effectiveness is a multidimensional construct and that it relates to many domains of activity in the college. Cameron (1985:54) argues that ‘because the most appropriate criteria of effectiveness may be difficult to identify, other more readily available criteria are substituted.’ The repertory grid interviews approach the stakeholders without any preconceptions about their criteria for effectiveness, and enables them to reveal their criteria, even if these bear no relation to the formal measures. Throughout this research I utilised a multidimensional approach to assessing organisational effectiveness that matched the multiple methods and mixed methodology of the research design. According to Buellens et al (2002:96) ‘Multiple criteria are necessary depending on the situation.’ They propose a set of guidelines for choosing the appropriate criteria that recommends using ‘the strategic constituencies approach when powerful stakeholders can significantly benefit or harm the organisation’.

Chapter Six, The College in Context, explores some of the causes of the college's ineffectiveness and indicates the importance of both the stakeholders' perceptions and their activities to the achievement of the college's effectiveness, and the way in which they are central to the processes inherent in achieving effectiveness.

Chapter 5

LEADERSHIP

One area which is key to the effectiveness of an organisation yet does not appear in many of the models of organisational effectiveness is leadership. This may be because the quality of leadership is not readily quantifiable and consequently is harder to relate to the key measurable targets so often associated with effectiveness eg sales, turnover, profit and other measurable goals. Nevertheless leadership will affect these targets. An interesting approach is taken by Schneider (2002) who argues that the stakeholder model of organisational leadership helps to predict leader effectiveness in organisations characterised by 'fuzzy organisational boundaries', flattened hierarchies and work relationships brought about through contracts instead of employment. Further education colleges fit that description as they form part of a new and enlarged post 16 sector which is increasingly complex, uncertain and ambiguous. This view is reinforced by Watson (2002) who argues that leadership needs to be related to wider cultural patterns and not just to the characteristics and actions of particular individuals. He further claims that 'what happens at the level of group behaviour must be seen in the context of the overall structural pattern of the organisation, if not of the whole society, in which the group is located' (Watson 2002:13).

If we accept that the college's environment is composed of a new order with new realities involving greater turbulence then what are the appropriate leadership skills? What type of leader will be able to cope with Handy's (1990) vision of an age of

unreason when ‘the only prediction that will hold true is that no prediction will hold true’?

1 Defining Leadership

Defining leadership is difficult. Many writers define it in terms of the models, roles and behaviours that are used to describe it, (Hallinger and Heck 1998; Leithwood et al 1999). A consensus coalesces around the leader as someone who organises others and takes decisions. Mullins (1996:278) defines leadership as ‘a relationship through which one person influences the behaviour and actions of other people. Many writers also include the ability to change people’s attitudes, to inspire others and to achieve goals or objectives. Often leadership is defined in terms of its distinctiveness compared with management. In this context leadership influences people and moves the organisation in a strategic direction. In contrast, management is largely concerned with the control and execution of existing processes. An interesting parallel can be made between leaders and managers, and effectiveness and efficiency, whereby leaders should be people who do the right things ie achieve effectiveness, whilst managers are people who do things right ie carry out tasks efficiently.

Although there is broad consensus on what leaders do, there are many varying theories about what makes an effective leader and how best to lead. One traditional approach is to draw up a list of traits or qualities which are either inherent in effective leaders or need to be developed. These qualities often include intelligence, charisma, confidence, diplomacy, lateral thinking, mental toughness and decisiveness. One side of the nature

vs nurture debate, concerning whether or not leaders are born or can be developed, is exemplified by Drucker (1989:156) who claims that, 'leadership is of utmost importance. Indeed there is no substitute for it. But leadership cannot be created or promoted. It cannot be taught or learned.' There are limitations to the qualities/traits approach, mainly because there is no satisfactory model, and there are numerous examples of effective leaders who display few of the standard leadership traits.

2 Creative leaders

It can be argued that colleges, like many organisations in a changing environment, require creative leaders who have a vision of how the college should be, and are charismatic enough to inspire others to follow this vision. Supporting the leader, the organisation needs champions to embed the vision. These champions are creative managers who advocate the new approach within their area of the organisation, by focusing on the people and processes needed to get the vision adopted. These creative managers act like Belbin's (1996) chairperson by ensuring that the group social needs are met, and a suitable climate is created which will accept and develop the new approach.

Kanter (1991) argues that the creative leader not only formulates a vision but also has the power to convince others of its value and to implement and continue the process of change. Therefore they need to be able to persuade, communicate, inspire and support others in achieving the vision. Even though leaders do not all display the same traits, Westley and Mintzberg (1991) describe five styles of visionary leadership: creator,

proselytiser, idealist, bricoleur and diviner. The first two are concerned with entrepreneurial ventures, and the latter three are more concerned with revitalising organisations, transforming them to become more creative and enterprising, and would thus be more appropriate to a college. It may be possible to map the type of leadership that is required by the maturity of the organisation and its immediate market. They conclude by observing that visions are transient and not easy to adapt to changed circumstances. Consequently, visionary leaders are the products of their times and of their followers.

Cooper and Hingley (1985) discuss the results of an empirical study of interviews with 17 'change-maker' leaders drawn from a varied range of sectors, private and public.

They outline five traits that this disparate group of individuals share:

- Leadership qualities
- Ability to see connections between things
- Intelligible language for complex ideas
- Passion and persistence
- Recognition that change can be tedious and painful

Cooper and Hingley describe the leaders with these traits as 'dynamic organisers who flourish within chaos.'

A more radical alternative leadership style is provided by Semler (1991). He describes a strategy that involved his own company, Semco, where he abolished most of the existing rules, norms and procedures, and instituted open book accounting. Employees have

been empowered to make many decisions that were previously the preserve of managers, including the appointment and appraisal of the remaining managers (many managers left during the early stages of Semler's 'revolution'), setting their own working hours, titles, salaries and expenses. Semler's objective is to maximise worker participation and minimise management control procedures that can inhibit change. This approach is probably not appropriate for a college in the public sector, where accountability for the expenditure of public money requires an element of bureaucracy and auditing. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that there is a need for leaders to be flexible and responsive so as to be able to meet the challenges produced by the changing environment. There is a need to empower staff rather than command and control them, particularly in a college, where the type of employees and the nature of the service provided predicated against formal controls being effective. Although this appears to contradict the traditional view of leadership as characterised by models of rational and systematic processes of strategic planning and co-ordination, it does support the research that encourages creativity in teams as well as leaders.

3 Creative teams

Effective leaders promote the development of effective, creative teams, for creativity is rarely the monopoly of one person. Teams are especially important in education where the process of teaching and learning is often carried out in teams, and the management processes should be congruent with this 'production process'. Indeed there is evidence that teams construct innovations through building on new ideas and one another's work. The team's contribution is often to take the new idea, which may or may not emanate

from the leader, and to modify it, extend it and apply it to local circumstances. Belbin (1996) identifies the effective team as one that accommodates nine characters, providing a mix of styles. Bennis (1989) emphasises the need for effective leaders to develop managers who combine competence, constancy, caring, fairness, candour and integrity. He further argues that 'leaders must develop a more imaginative approach in order to be effective'. Employees need to be enthused and fully absorbed with corporate philosophy, rather than to follow instructions in a mechanical way.

The management team, like the leader, needs to display competent leadership skills. They must adopt different ways of working and share the ownership of leadership. This is required at all levels of the organisation, so that, according to Morgan (1997:6), 'increasingly the leadership process will become identified with an ability to mobilise the energies and commitments of people through the creation of shared values and shared understanding.' For this shared leadership to flourish the leader must have trust in their managers and other employees. Schein (1990) sees this trust as being fundamental to the success of the organisation. 'Leaders will become dependent on other people in the organisation. A leader with cynical attitude towards human nature is bound to create bureaucratic rigidity. The resulting control oriented organisation may survive and even thrive in certain kinds of stable environment, but they are certain to fail as the environment becomes more turbulent' (Schein 1990:367). It is this turbulence that is an important feature of the present post-16 education sector, and it has certainly been evident in the Isle of Wight College.

4 Individual characteristics of leaders

In order for creative teams to flourish and to improve the organisation's effectiveness, the leadership needs to display appropriate characteristics. Argyris (1973) argued that a great deal of organisational outcomes, including effectiveness depend on the degree of congruence between individual (personal) characteristics and those of the organisation as personified by the leader. He suggests that leaders often display what he refers to as Model 1 behaviour (Argyris et al 1985:89) and this inhibits double-loop learning. The characteristics of this behaviour are set out below and are considered against the data in Chapter 12, Leadership re-visited.

Model 1 theory-in-use characteristics

The governing values of Model 1 are:

- Achieve the purpose as the actor defines it
- Win, do not lose
- Suppress negative feelings
- Emphasise rationality

Primary strategies are:

- Control environment and task unilaterally
- Protect self and others unilaterally

Usually operationalised by:

- Unillustrated attributions and evaluations eg "You seem unmotivated"
- Advocating courses of action which discourage inquiry eg "Let's not talk about the past, that's over."
- Treating ones' own views as obviously correct
- Making covert attributions and evaluations
- Face-saving moves such as leaving potentially embarrassing facts unstated

Consequences include:

- Defensive relationships
- Low freedom of choice
- Reduced production of valid information
- Little public testing of ideas

This view was reinforced by Kristoff (1996) who demonstrated that a significant determinant of organisational commitment is the congruence of personal and organisational characteristics, or person-organisation fit. Kristoff defined fit to mean 'the compatibility between people and organisations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both'. Organisational-professional conflict is a direct measure of compatibility between the organisation and the individual (Shafer et al, 2002). Employees at the college exhibit a conflict between organisational demands, and what they perceive as their own professional imperatives. The repertory grid interviews and the FEDA open question responses indicate that the employees are experiencing a schism between their personal commitment to the values of their profession, and the organisational demands, as expressed by the leadership, for behaviours that conflicts with those values. The organisation's needs will alter during these times of environmental change, and this may require an appropriate leadership model that is able to adapt to these changes, such a model is provide by the contingent leadership model.

6 Contingent leadership

Contingent leadership may provide an appropriate model for a further education college, and is proposed by the draft (2000) FENTO (Further Education National

Training Organisation) 'Management standards for further education'. In this model, leadership is viewed as being situationally focused. Consequently changes in the organisation's contexts, both internally and externally, will require different leadership responses. Leaders need to utilise a range of leadership styles and techniques to meet these varied contexts. The standards emphasise the development of personal attributes particularly the ability to motivate and influence others, and that these attributes need not reside in a single individual leader.

7 Conclusion

Effective leadership in an organisation, such as a college that is threatened by changes in the external environment and internal practices imposed by the new regulatory bodies, notably the LSC (Learning and Skills Council), is characterised by planning expertise, ability to exercise control over implementation, and an approach that inspires workers to work for the success of goals, according to Heifetz and Laurie (1997). They further conclude that leaders are not born but are made and that they should continue learning as they go through the challenging process of enabling the organisation (college) to keep pace with change. The importance of leadership is emphasised in the EFQM model, where it is seen as the prime enabler that facilitates the triple inputs of people, partnerships and resources and policy and strategy, in the processes that achieve the key performance results.

The influence of leadership on the college's effectiveness is explored in Chapter twelve and in the Conclusions and Recommendations, where evidence is analysed from the two cycles of research, particularly the repertory grid interviews and the FEDA survey, and

related to the literature on leadership in general, and that relating more specifically to leadership in the educational sector.

Chapter 6

The Isle of Wight College in Context

In this section I will endeavour to provide a description of the Isle of Wight College. This is done for three reasons. Firstly, it provides useful background information and environmental context for the research. Secondly, it illustrates why the Isle of Wight College was such a suitable subject for action research in the area of organisational effectiveness. Thirdly it provides a starting point for how I came to collect different stakeholder views on the college and to consequently seek their views on its effectiveness. The descriptions themselves form part of the research in that they represent some of the evidence that the Isle of Wight College is perceived as being ineffective by many of the major stakeholders. The Isle of Wight College will also be referred to as the College. This is not simply a matter of semantics or just to save space. In an important sense it emphasises the significance of the College to the stakeholders and the centrality of place to the distinctiveness of its culture, just as the Isle of Wight itself is often referred to as the Island. The College on the Island – these are important descriptors. I have worked at the College since 1997, and it is the sixth college I have worked in full time. I have also visited many other colleges, but in none of them have I felt the importance of place and location as I have here. The community in the College, both staff and students, reflect the Island-wide view that they are apart, are distinctive and that in general the College like the Island and its people are somehow different from the rest of the country (often referred to as the mainland, or more dismissively as the ‘north island’). Whether or not this apparent distinctiveness constitutes a real difference is difficult to ascertain.

The descriptions in this section are drawn from a number of stakeholders and sources including in no particular order of importance:

- Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) Inspection Reports
- The College's Self-Assessment Report
- Various College documents
- Newspaper cuttings
- Comments made in student assignments.

The most recent full FEFC inspection report on the College begins as follows:

“The Isle of Wight College is the only further education college on the Island. Students are recruited almost entirely from the Island, although the College enrolls some 80 students from the mainland on to higher education programmes and 100 students from overseas, mainly from the Far East. The College was established in 1951 to provide courses in construction and engineering. The main site is on the outskirts of Newport, the Island's county town, which has a population of 25,157. A variety of land-based courses are provided at Holliers Farm in Bathingbourne, 8 miles away. In addition, the College provides a small amount of teaching in outreach centres situated in different parts of the Island.”

FEFC Report 1999

The local context is described in the College's most recent Self-Assessment Report. This is an annual report produced by all further education colleges for the FEFC as part of the inspection process.

“With a resident population of 126,000 the Island is the size of a typical provincial town, yet covers an area of some 150 square miles. The semi-rural aspect of much of the Island, together with the natural barrier of the Solent, limits the mobility of the local labour market and also impacts on the cost-effectiveness of business. There are a number of other distinguishing features of the Island economy, which set it apart from most other areas in the South East Region:

- GDP per head is 75.5% of the UK average
- Average earnings are £8.25 per hour – compared with £10.03 (UK) and £10.61 (SE)
- 95% of Island businesses employ less than 25 people
- 39% of the population (49,000) is economically active

The Isle of Wight College was established as a technical college, funded by the local education authority (LEA) in 1951, initially offering courses in construction and engineering. It was incorporated under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1993. The College is now defined as a general further education college and, for its size has one of the broadest curriculums of any of the 430 further education institutions in England and Wales.”

College Self-Assessment Report 2001

The College has both a vision statement and a mission statement, and whilst the vision statement is rather long and convoluted, they are both worth stating here because they refer to stakeholders in a way that reflects my model of effectiveness.

The College vision statement is as follows:

“The College aims to be the pre-eminent provider of post-16 education, training and lifelong learning for individual learners and organisations on the Isle of Wight. It will provide 16-19 and adult students with a wide range of learning experiences and opportunities to successfully achieve qualifications. The College will promote lifelong learning, including higher education, within the community it serves and provide increased access to its learning programmes. To achieve its mission, the College actively promotes a culture of excellence in all areas of its teaching and in the provision of its support services. The College seeks a partnership with all its stakeholders in order to develop the full potential of its students, staff, and the wider community.”

The College mission statement is thankfully shorter and concentrates solely on satisfying its stakeholders:

“To develop the full potential of all College stakeholders through high quality learning services.”

This emphasis on “developing the full potential of stakeholders” and “seeking a partnership with all its stakeholders” was one of the reasons for choosing the stakeholder model of effectiveness as the one to test the data against. It also provided potential opportunities for interventions to improve the College’s effectiveness by developing this “partnership with all its stakeholders”.

Let us now examine what some of the stakeholders have to say about the College’s effectiveness, starting with the FEFC’s Inspection Report. This is taken from the last

full inspection in February 1999. The report was critical of the College, resulting in an interim re-inspection in March 2000 of those six areas graded 4 and another re-inspection in March 2001 of the two remaining grade 4 areas. The Figure below illustrates the College's poor performance in the view of the FEFC Inspectors.

Figure 6.1 Aggregated grades for all colleges inspected during 1998-1999

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	
Cross college Provision	18	54	24	4	

The descriptors for the grades are:

- Grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- Grade 2 - good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- Grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- Grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- Grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection of the college in 1999 are given below:

Figure 6.2 Isle of Wight College Inspection Grades 1999

Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	4
Engineering	4
Business	3
Hospitality and catering	3
Health and care	3
Basic education	3
Cross-college provision	
Support for students	3
General resources	4
Quality assurance	4
Governance	4
Management	4

These grades constitute an ineffective college in the eyes of the inspectorate, and were expanded on at length in the report. It is illuminating to quote in some detail from the report, in order to underline the Inspectorate's view, and to compare it with the views expressed by other stakeholders. It is also interesting to note some of the statements made by the inspectors in the light of subsequent events.

Reference is made more than once to the then new Principal X:

“A new principal was appointed to the College in September 1998. Since then the College has started to address a number of significant management and financial issues.”

1999 Inspection Report page 26 Para 75

“The College has lacked decisive leadership and effective management. Inadequate clarity of purpose and strategic direction damaged the College’s capacity to cope with change. Firm leadership is now enabling progress to be made in responding to the College’s difficulties, on which staff have been extensively and regularly briefed. Briefing meetings are supported by written statements. Staff welcome these new opportunities to understand the College’s problems.”

1999 Inspection Report page 26 Para 77

“The previous inspection report identified a number of weaknesses in the management structure. A revised senior management structure, introduced in October 1998, has introduced greater clarity into management arrangements. The principal, vice-principal and assistant principal constitute the principalship. The director of finance and administration, seven heads of division, the head of facilities and the personnel manager complete the senior management team of 13. The team deals with all key strategic and operational issues. It conducts its business regularly and efficiently.

1999 Inspection Report page 26 Para 78

“Most teaching is of a satisfactory standard, but too little is good or outstanding. The College should now act rapidly to: resolve the dilemma over its premises; address serious issues of governance; address its working financial status; use the data from its management information systems to set performance targets for students’ retention and achievements; revise its tutorial policy to ensure that

absence is addressed effectively; develop its quality assurance mechanisms; build on existing good practice in key skills teaching; and ensure that the implementation of policy is properly monitored and evaluated, paying particular attention to issues that involve equality of opportunity and health and safety.”

1999 Inspection. Summary page 1

There was a re-inspection of the College in March 2000 of the two curriculum areas and the four cross-college provisions that had scored grade fours in the 1999 Inspection. This resulted in just two grade fours namely the curriculum area of science and maths (computing was disaggregated and awarded a grade three), and the cross-college provision of quality assurance.

Meanwhile during 1999 the new principal X had left, to be replaced on a temporary basis for six months by the vice-principal, who in turn was replaced by the present principal Y in September 2000. Four principals in three years, each of whom carried out re-structuring and major management changes.

The ‘official’ College view of the present (February 2001) management is stated in the self-assessment report:

“The College now has a robust strategic plan, review and monitoring process, driving the College in the direction intended. The College’s strategic plan is fully linked to the College’s quality assurance system.”

“A successful major restructuring of management at third and fourth tiers has been completed. This is leading to the creation of a corporate culture within the College and is addressing the ‘divisionalism’ which previously occurred.”

“The College has embarked upon an innovative programme of surveying staff attitudes and addressing staff concerns in order to tackle issues surrounding the culture of the College.”

“Effective top-down/bottom-up communication with staff on strategic issues facing the College.”

College Self-Assessment Report, February 2001

This official College management perspective, and the preceding FEFC views are not entirely supported by those members of the teaching staff in their assignments produced for their MBA/DMS (Master of Business Administration/Diploma in Management Studies) and Certificate of Education courses over the same three-year period. As I have taught many College staff during the past three years I have taken copies of sections of their assignments that contain interesting observations of the College. I must emphasise that these copies were only made with the writers’ knowledge and approval, and with the understanding that their views would remain confidential. I hope to have achieved this through some careful editing to remove any clues as to the writers’ identities. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those colleagues for providing me with such a useful and fascinating source of data, as a by-product of their own academic endeavours whilst studying on their MBA/DMS or Certificate of Education courses.

The following comments are representative of the eighteen assignments that have commented upon the effectiveness of the College whilst producing assessments for MBA/DMS units on Managing People, HRM or Managing Change or the Certificate of Education unit, Management and Administration. I must stress again, that these comments were not solicited by me. They are nearly all comments made at the beginning of their assignments when setting the scene and providing background information about the College before exploring a wide range of topics. However, these scene-setting sketches are, I believe, very revealing, and further emphasise why this organisation has been ineffective.

The first extract is from an assignment written in May 1999.

“The post-incorporation era has brought about many changes in the FE sector, to the detriment of a number of colleges throughout the UK, including the Isle of Wight College.

.....staff have been de-motivated with some senior members of staff looking for a way out. The good old boys biding their time and waiting for the right ‘stress’ opportunity to make their inevitable move for freedom.

The reduction in funding required some form of rationalisation of provision and resources, but the Principal of the day at the Isle of Wight College wanted a ‘community college’ that was everything to everyone with little concern for, or ability to react to, the inevitable outcomes.

.....the College looked to become entrepreneurial and move away from its core business to set up a company to operate as a separate training arm, both on the UK mainland and in Europe. The lure of European Social Fund money was too great to be ignored. The unfortunate ramifications of this action and others of some senior managers are on going both in terms of the effects on human resources and financial implications.

Mistakes had been made and were about to be compounded by the aspirational vision of a 'ready to retire' Principal whose dream and swan song was to leave his name appended to a New Isle of Wight College. Naïve, ignorant or easily persuaded governors were 'happy' to go along with the strategy, so rational and appropriate decision making processes went by the board and the venture into the corporate world of 'big money' would cost us dear.

The man has gone, along with others, apparently unaccountable, who jointly have left the College financially embarrassed and fighting an uphill battle against the rumour and perceptions of its local community. The same community we strive so hard to serve. The time, cost and resources wasted on this one man's dream, could and should have been used to the greater benefit of the College's stakeholders.

The Principal retired and change was needed – the governing body of the College decided in their wisdom not to promote the existing Vice-Principal and brought in Principal X, new blood who apparently had a ‘good track-record’ of turning around another college which had found itself in a similar position.

.....six weeks after his arrival Principal X instigated a radical re-organisation of senior and middle management, with the loss of six managers through the process of redundancy. With such radical executions being made at ‘the top’, the rest of the players were left looking over their shoulder and keeping their heads down. These enforced and some say unethical redundancies, left a legacy of mistrust towards the organisation, the traditional staff culture of loyalty and good will has been eroded to breaking point.

.....as a leader, X did not inspire others to share his vision.

.....unfortunately, X lacked any recent experience in managing the wholesale changes that were required to put the organisation back on the right track.

.....the VP has been Acting Principal since X was suspended on 3 March 1999.”

Let me now move the story forward to January 2000, and part of the introduction to another assignment by a different member of staff:

“The College has struggled to come to terms with incorporation, and the subsequent need for changes in behaviour and attitude of all its members. Management has undergone several periods of restructuring in an attempt to meet the demands of incorporation.

The retirement of the existing Principal in July 1998 was greeted as an opportunity for change; the College was in poor financial health, the buildings had been allowed to fall into disrepair and the six departments were parochial and competitive. The arrival of X in September 1998 was to herald what was to become a nightmare scenario for both management and staff. The resultant restructure, which took place within six weeks of this arrival, was generally thought to be savage and inhumane. Much of the middle management structure was removed, the remaining management had an untenable workload, managing a department and taking on a cross-college role. The effect of the reorganisation permeated through all levels of the organisation and the wider community, staff were seen to be devastated, finding it difficult to hide their feelings. The remaining managers, tied to the local area by family and commitments, had to make the best of a very poor situation. Working relationships and long term friendships were broken; students were left without suitable replacement tutors. Sickness levels amongst staff began to rise.

.....an inspection in February 1999 identified the College as failing. Many of the staff, management and governors questioned the validity of the inspection and in March 1999 Principal X left the College following a vote of no confidence by staff, support staff and governors. Another new Principal, Y arrived in September 1999. The College has a new governing body

The final extract from a third colleague's assignment was written in December 2000:

“The corporate culture of the Isle of Wight College, the organisation in which I am employed, has been, and to a significant extent still is, an organisation entrenched in mistrust, cynicism and fear. This is most notably displayed in the numerous rumours particularly about members of the senior management/executive team which more often than not bear to relation to reality. These rumours add further to the College's culture of mistrust and fear thus making the negative culture difficult to break.”

These extracts are typical of the unsystematic descriptions and views expressed in the assignments, and provide further evidence that the College is ineffective. They provided some of the initial triggers that prompted this action research, and they have also contributed to the triangulation of sources. What was I to make of these comments when first I read them, and kept reading them in all those assignments? Were they merely expressions of individual disillusion or were they indicators of more fundamental problems? My further research using individual Repertory Grid interviews, small group

interviews and the large-scale questionnaire and accompanying comments explores these issues in depth.

Meanwhile other stakeholders have opinions about the College. I have looked at the views of the FEFC, the College Executive and members of the teaching staff, and will now examine the views of the wider community as expressed by the local weekly paper, 'the Isle of Wight County Press' (hereafter referred to as the County Press).

The Newspaper Analysis

As with the previous extracts used in this chapter, the newspaper extracts are here for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are being used to describe the College in a way that adds to the variety of descriptions. Secondly, they illustrate why I initially wanted to research the theme of organisational effectiveness within the College. Thirdly, they also suggest very strongly that yet another stakeholder group finds the College to be ineffective. These extracts and the subsequent analysis are particularly powerful because I used all the references made over three years in The County Press's coverage of the College, thus making it a particularly valid sample. Consequently, I maintain that they are representative of the local community's view as reported by the local paper, and probably reflect the views of the community as a whole. They represent my reality as I see it.

My first analysis of The County Press examined all the references to the College between 2 February 1998 and 2 February 2001. That is, all the editorial references and

those occurring in letters, and excluding paid for advertisements or features accompanying advertisements. During this period there were 335 articles and letters referring to the College. Of these, 307 were articles and 28 were letters. I then categorised them in terms of their tone, general tenor, and whether or not they present the College in a favourable light. The three categories I have used are:

Positive those articles and letters which present a favourable image, and if read would promote the College to the local community.

Negative those articles and letters which present a negative image of the College, are generally critical and would have a negative effect on the College's standing in the community.

Neutral those articles and letters which mention the College, but do so either only in passing, as an incidental to the main story or in a way which the College dimension to the story would elicit neither positive nor negative reactions in the reader. I have also designated as neutral those articles that refer to individuals as having attended High School X and the College, as I felt that this would also have a neutral effect on the reader.

I excluded the paid for advertisements and the occasional 'advertising feature' copy, as they do not reflect the views of the stakeholder groups I am trying to capture, namely the local community and media as expressed through the weekly paper.

An example of a neutral story is one from 7.5.99 headlined 'soldier Kate, 18, takes break from Balkan dangers', where the College is mentioned along with Ryde High School as

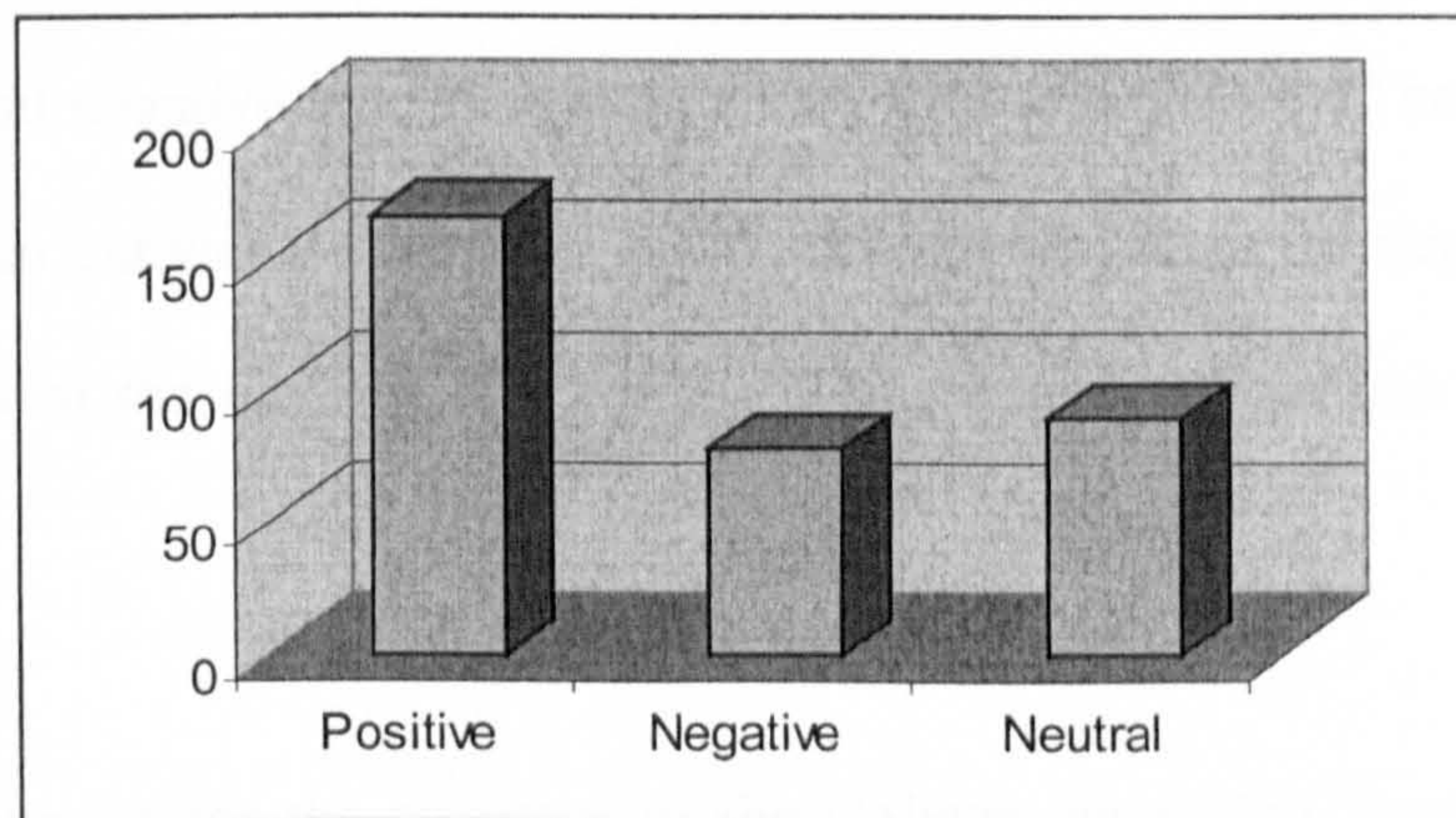
an institution previously attended by Kate, but it is unimportant to the story. This is a positive story about an Islander serving in the Balkans, but what little spin-off there is for the College is cancelled out by the bracketing with Ryde High School.

Of the 335 stories, 166 presented a positive image of the College, 79 were negative and 90 were neutral. This suggests a generally favourable local press, as shown below.

Figure 6.3

Non-paid for References to the College in The County Press

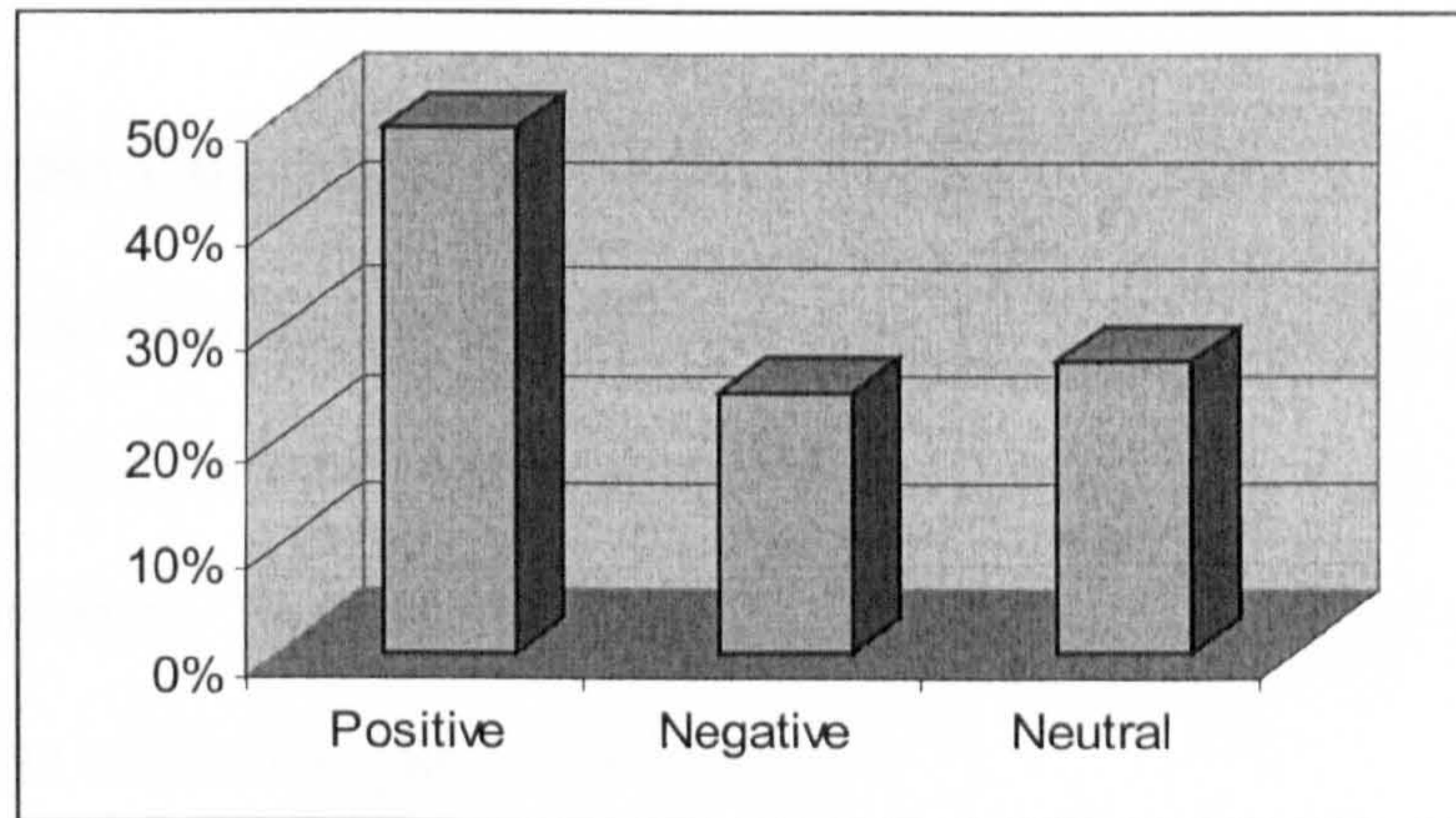
February 1998 – February 2001



This translates into 49% positive, 24% negative and 27% neutral.

Figure 6.4

% of Newspaper Articles positive, negative or neutral about the College



If the neutral articles are excluded as in figure 6.6 there are 68% positive and only 32% negative, a ratio of 2:1. However, an examination of the size, content and headlines of the positive and negative articles reveals a very different picture. The positive articles usually relate to individual student or group successes, whereas the negative articles are mostly critical of the College as a whole. The negative articles are also on average longer.

The pivotal months for the coverage of the College were May, June and July 1999, especially May, when the FEFC Inspection Report was published. As can be seen in figure 6.6, the number of articles in May is much higher than the average of 10 articles per month at 26. Of these 14 are positive and 10 are negative with 2 neutral. These articles and letters in May are vital to the community's view of the College, and they re-occur in some of the constructs revealed in the Repertory Grid Interviews. The month of May 1999 deserves special analysis, and also illustrates the poor image of the College in

the community, and the way in which the positive articles whilst greater in number have less impact than the negative articles.

May 1999 Press Coverage

The story starts in the issue of 7 May 1999 with an above average 7 positive references, and just one neutral reference (the already mentioned 'Balkans army' story), and just one negative reference. The positive references included the headlines

'Chinese students will be studying at IW College'

'Experts quizzed on leisure and tourism' – a story about the links between College students and local leisure and tourism companies

'Disco cash for hospice' – students raising cash for a local charity

'College musicians on tuneful tour' – BTEC Popular Music course students to tour the mainland

'Whistle stop menu keep Waterloo commuters fed' – a team of catering students competing in a competition held in Waterloo Station.

However, the one negative reference was so powerful and its timing so unfortunate it sparked the proverbial 'double whammy' which took place the following week. The comment occurred in an article headlined 'Boys fear studies hit 'macho' image', an above average length piece about a consultative partnership consisting of pupils, teachers, councillors and other individuals connected with schools, and the alleged reason why boys lagged behind the girls in learning. This it was claimed was because learning was not considered 'macho' on the Island. This assertion was followed by another quote from a male pupil at Carisbrooke High School, 'I was called a poof and

stuff like that, but I am proud now that I have got my results that my work has paid off. Those that don't work and don't get the results end up down at the College.'

It was that last sentence which elicited three letters defending the College the following week, 14 May 1999, but even though they were supporting the College, they repeated the critical remark and were headed in the letters page by 'College students reply to 'work-shy' comments'. That was the same week that the most critical, negative and damning articles appeared in the County Press reporting the publication of the FEFC's Inspection Report. This constituted the major article on the front page, under the banner headline 'Whitehall names and shames the IW College' (Appendix 1). Despite being the longest article on the front page it was continued on page 4 with an equally lengthy article with its own headline 'Inspection team reports 'serious weaknesses' at IW College.

Whilst the articles contained some optimistic and defensive quotes from the then Principal and chair of governors, it was mostly unremittingly critical of the College (see Appendix 1). But this wasn't the only negative article in the 14 May 1999 edition of the County Press, there was another headlined 'Education chief may go back to College'. This referred to the inclusion of the Island's director of education in the College's new governing body alongside two Island businessmen, and contained what were to become common references to 'troubled times'.

A week later on the 21 May 1999 a further major article appeared as the front page lead, headlined 'Demand for more council control of 'flawed' college', which commenced

with the following sentence, 'The former leader of the IW Council has claimed that the IW College is now flawed, unmanageable and not delivering the product'. On an inside page, below the headline 'New boss sought as students fight back', another article began with 'a new Principal to take the reins of the troubled IW College is set to be in post by September 1 – exactly a year on from the last appointment.'

Finally on the 28 May, three long letters were published in support of the College, but whilst they attempted to defend the college they had to re-state the recent criticisms in order to refute them, therefore the overall effect was yet again negative.

Meanwhile during this dismal month of May for the College three national newspaper articles appeared which presented the College in the worst possible light. There had been two previous articles in March 1999, both in the Times Educational Supplement under the headlines 'Third of jobs in jeopardy' and 'Further trouble for Isle's College', but the three in May were much worse for the College, and resulted in echoes later in my research. The first of these appeared in The Guardian on 11 May 1999. This was a front full page piece in The Guardian Education Extra, headlined 'Too close to the wind?' and started with 'the Further Education Funding Council's report published yesterday was highly critical of the College's management. But the governors also take a bashing,' and so it continued. The reference to sailing in the headline referred to Principal X, the Principal appointed in September 1998, who left a mere six months later in mysterious circumstances by literally sailing into the sunset on the yacht he had lived on whilst it was moored on the Medina Estuary, a short bicycle ride from the College.

On 13 May 1999 there appeared two similar articles, one in The Daily Telegraph headlined 'Best and worst of colleges named', and the other in The Independent headlined 'Four worst colleges named and blamed'. All three national newspaper articles quoted from a speech made by the Education Minister, Baroness Blackstone to Parliament. It is worth quoting from these articles, partly because of the already alluded to echoes which occur in the repertory grid interviews, but also because they may have influenced the FEFC's relationship with the College since, the strong sense of injustice felt by some members of the College, and the behaviour of the FEFC in terms of appointments in the College. What exactly was said by the Minister and reported by the newspapers on that fateful day? Let us start with The Independent:

"Ministers yesterday named the worst further education colleges in the country and praised the best ones.

The announcement comes after a series of damning inspection reports on colleges. Two years ago, ministers named and shamed the worst schools in an effort to raise standards, but then abandoned the policy.

Baroness Blackstone, the Higher Education Minister, announced that 10 colleges would become 'beacon' colleges and receive an extra £50,000 each to spread good practice.

But a further four were singled out because of their poor results and poor student attendance records. They are Matthew Boulton College, Birmingham, Ealing

Tertiary College, West London, the Isle of Wight College and West Cumbria College, Workington

.....Lady Blackstone said, 'the Government will not tolerate unacceptable standards or hesitate to intervene where colleges are failing their students and communities.....'

In The Telegraph on the same date, the story was similar:

"Some of the best and worst of further education colleges were named by the Government yesterday....."

.....Lady Blackstone, Education Minister, said 'the Government will not tolerate unacceptable standards, or hesitate to intervene where colleges are failing their students and communities

.....the Further Education Funding Council recently published a damning report on Wirral Metropolitan College, Birkenhead, which accumulated debts of £12 million.

The Fraud Squad are investigating the financial management at Bilston College, Wolverhampton, which has debts of £9.2 million.

Wirral College is under fresh management, with a new board of governors. New governors have also been appointed at Bilston, where a merger with another college is considered.

The council found ‘some failure to account properly for public funds at Matthew Boulton College, Birmingham. Inspectors condemned this college, along with Ealing Tertiary College, West London, Isle of Wight College, and West Cumbria College, Workington, for poor results and poor levels of student attendance ’

The importance of these quotes and their subsequent repetition is twofold. Firstly, was it true to say that the Isle of Wight College was one of the ‘four worst’ colleges in May 1999, or did it just receive a poor inspection report at the same time that a number of high profile failing colleges came to light and were being publicly named by the Minister, and thus ended up being unfairly bracketed with these truly ‘worst colleges’? Secondly, did this label, regardless of its veracity, cause a number of stakeholders to believe the College was ineffective, and to act accordingly?

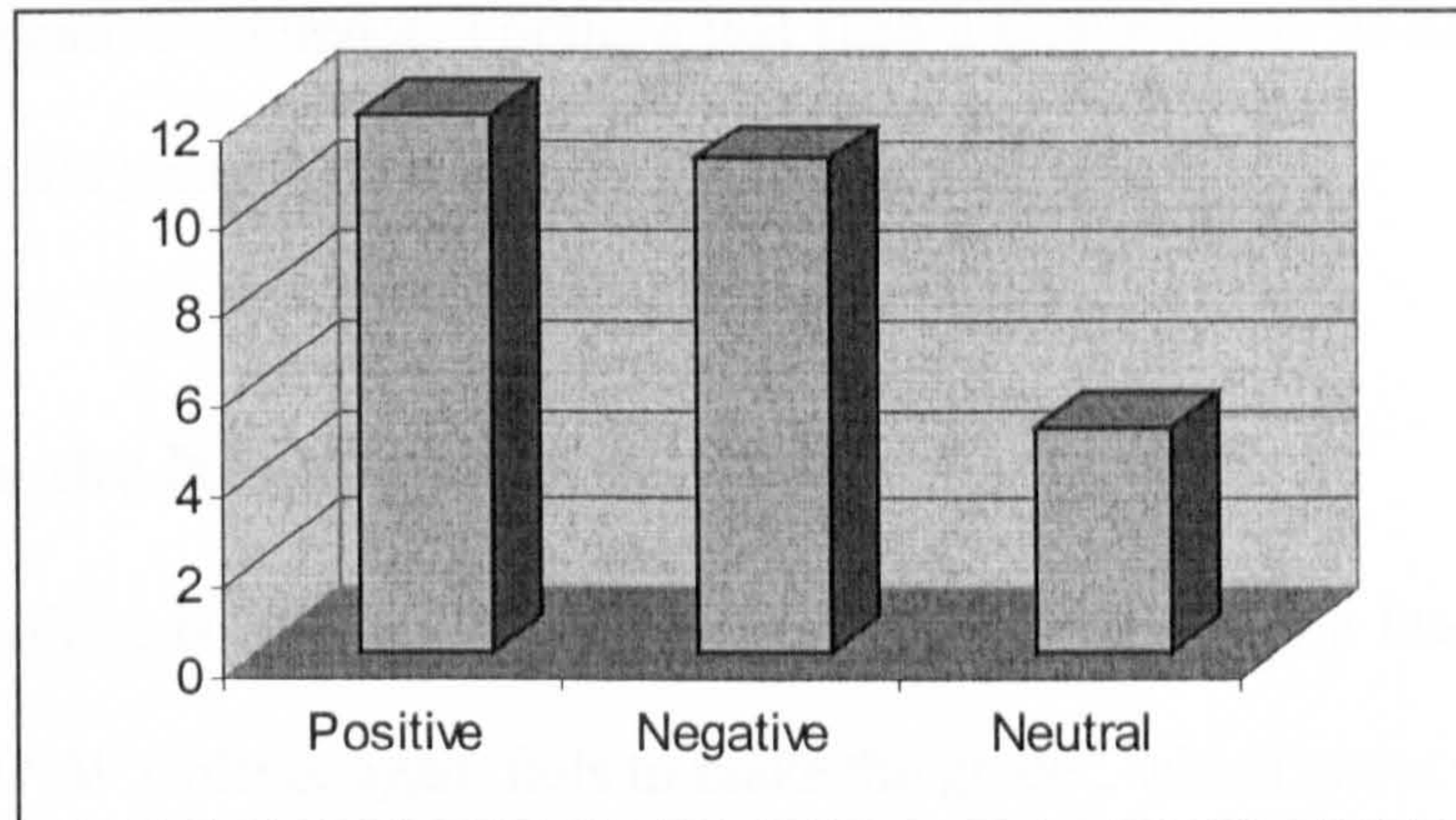
Letters published in The County Press

I have also attempted to analyse the letters published in The County Press between February 1998 and February 2001. These are included in the complete review of articles and letters discussed earlier, but I felt that they might yield something independently interesting as they represent a voice of the community stakeholders separate from the newspaper’s own articles. A total of 38 letters were printed (Figure 6.5) out of a total of 335 articles and letters. Of these letters, I classified 12 as being positive towards the College, 11 were negative and 5 were neutral. Therefore, if these neutral letters are removed, a ratio of 1:1 is created which is worse than the generality of references in the newspaper.

Figure 6.5

Letters to The County Press February 1999-2001, containing references to the

College



Headlines

My final analysis of the community's view of the College looked at all the headlines during the same period, February 1998 to February 2001. I thought that this would be important because readers do not always read the whole article, so that headlines might better reflect the image of the College being absorbed by the local community, or at least the image being projected by the newspaper. I took for the analysis all those headlines containing the word 'college' and categorised them into those that suggested a positive or neutral view of the College, and those that suggested a negative view. Unlike the analysis of all the references to the College where I felt comfortable using a three set category of positive, negative and neutral resulting from an examination of the whole article or letter, the headlines being shorter more readily fell into a simple positive, negative dichotomy.

Of the total of 84 headlines containing the word college (Figures 6.8,6.9) I categorised 43 as being positive or neutral and 41 as negative, a ratio of 1:1 which, like the letters, is significantly worse than my analysis of all the references with its ratio of two positives to every one negative reference. I believe that such a high number of negative headlines reflect the Island's general view that the College is ineffective.

Postscript to the Newspaper Analyses

As I write this there is in today's County Press (23 March 2001) a lead article on page two, headlined 'IW College again fails to make the grade', which starts with:

“Almost two years after a highly critical education inspection, the IW College has still been unable to bring two key areas up to a satisfactory standard

.....in the highly critical original inspection published in May 1999, the FEFC inspectors gave the College a Grade 4 in six of the eleven areas inspected.

This was followed days later by the college being one of only four throughout the country to be named by the Department for Education and Employment as having serious weaknesses that needed to be urgently addressed.

Since then the college governing body has changed almost completely and in conjunction with the new principal a package of measures were drawn up to put the college back on track.....”

County Press, 23 March 2001

So, there are the references yet again to a 'highly critical report', and 'one in four named as having serious weaknesses.' Once more the newspaper report reinforces the “widely

held view” that the college is ineffective. It seems that the newspaper’s own writers, journalists, editorial writers and sub-editors have a more negative view of the college than is apparent in the general community, as the headlines produced by the newspaper’s staff are on average more negative than all the articles referring to the college. However the negative view is reflected in the content of the letters published, which match the 1:1 ratio of positive to negative views indicated by the headlines.

Figure 6.6

Non-paid for Cuttings/Editorial Features/letters in 'The County Press' Containing References to the College

		Positive	Negative	Neutral
1998	February	9	1	1
	March	4	0	2
	April	2	0	0
	May	4	3	0
	June	4	3	1
	July	7	2	5
	August	2	1	7
	September	2	1	0
	October	6	4	4
	November	3	1	5
	December	3	1	0
	1999	January	3	3
February		4	1	5
March		7	1	3
April		4	1	2
May		14	10	2
June		7	4	0
August		0	0	1
September		3	2	1
October		7	2	4
November		3	4	2
December		7	3	6
2000		January	4	5
	February	4	0	2
	March	7	3	2
	April	5	0	1
	May	6	1	1
	June	7	1	2
	July	8	3	5
	August	2	0	4
	September	2	6	0
	October	3	2	4
	November	4	1	6
	December	5	1	3
2001	January	0	3	1
	February	0	0	2
		166	79	90
Aggregate total: 335		49%	24%	27%
or taking out the neutrals:				
Aggregate total: 245		68%	32%	
A ratio of:		2	:	1

Figure 6.7
National Newspaper Articles Referring to The Isle of Wight College

Date	Newspaper	Headline
12.3.99	Times Educational Supplement	“Third of jobs in jeopardy”
11.5.99	The Guardian	“Too close to the wind?”
13.5.99	The Independent	“Four worst colleges named and blamed”
13.5.99	The Daily Telegraph	“Best and worst colleges named”
31.3.00	Times Educational Supplement	“Further trouble for Isle’s College”

Figure 6.8
Positive or Neutral Headlines in 'The County Press' since February 1998
Containing the Word 'College'

Date	Headline
6/2/98	Computer Giant Boost for College IT section
13/2/98	Chance to join College cook-ins
13/2/98	College looks to future
27/3/98	New Head of College named
26/6/98	Rock goes to College with new course
10/7/98	Academic success sparks quest for College students
7/8/98	College visit paves way for College students
28/8/98	College offers new course in hospitality management
27/11/98	College boost for funds
26/2/99	IW College inspection results ready in May
5/3/99	Feast of choice at College banquets
5/3/99	Feast for the senses in artist's College garden
19/3/99	Mr Branson back in harness at College
19/3/99	College runners get ready
19/3/99	Six weeks waiting list for Sunday lunch at College
1/4/99	College students dig in for gardening career
7/5/99	College musicians in tuneful tour
7/5/99	Chinese students will be studying at IW College
14/5/99	IW College offering more higher education courses
28/5/99	College vital to economic future
4/6/99	Islanders should value College – <i>headline over 3 supporting letters</i>
9/7/99	New principal vows to strengthen college
1/10/99	College art student to the rescue
8/10/99	East meets West during lessons at IW College
22/10/99	Jo works out a new number at IW College
4/2/00	College regeneration starting to show results - <i>headline over letter from Principal Y</i>
28/4/00	Vote of confidence for improving IW College
19/5/00	College computer course puts Grahame's career back of track
26/5/00	IW College governor named
16/6/00	Colleges link up so more can study
7/7/00	Students put some colour into College
7/7/00	Art students show off work at College
4/2/00	New look IW College revealed to planners
15/9/00	Single mum is College's own A-team
13/10/00	Outstanding success in HND exams for IW College students
27/10/00	Fact-finding tour to IW College
24/11/00	College backing for direct learning
29/12/00	College helping to provide nursing and teaching staff
26/1/01	From the bottom of my heart I wish IW College well
2/2/01	College to get £3m if B&Q plan approved
9/2/01	College's success depends on wide choice of quality courses
16/2/01	Success on the menu for IW College team
23/2/01	Debating coup for College

Figure 6.9
Negative headlines in ‘The County Press’ since February 1998 Containing the
Word ‘College’

Date	Headline
13/3/98	Decision deferred on College plan
17/4/98	Finance plea by College chief for go-ahead on retail park
8/5/98	Trader hits out over spending on campaign for a new IW College
12/6/98	College agency under probe
12/6/98	Students’ video volley in new college battle
26/6/98	College retail park plan rejected but hope kept alive
9/10/98	Six jobs axed as new broom sweeps troubled college
9/10/98	New man sets college on calm water course
6/10/98	Union anger over college cuts
4/12/98	Mainland college merger ruled out
15/1/99	College faces £60,000 bill for advice
12/2/99	Action looms over college pay crisis
12/3/99	College head suspended
14/5/99	Whitehall names and shames IW College
14/5/99	Inspection team reports ‘serious weaknesses’ at IW College
21/5/99	Hope future headline will praise College – <i>headline for 3 letters in support!</i>
14/5/99	College students reply to ‘work-shy’ comment – <i>headline for 3 letters in support!</i>
14/5/99	Education chief may go back to college
21/5/99	Demand for more council control of ‘flawed’ college
25/6/99	College job hearing postponed
25/6/99	New college governor taking over reins
9/7/99	Stand-in college boss turned down for permanent job
3/9/99	College treated women badly, says ex-lecturer
5/10/99	College staff had to play musical chairs
26/11/99	IW College in payout to lecturer
6/12/99	Spin-doctor to rid college of its tarnished image
10/12/99	Why not employ these skills to run college effectively? – <i>headline over letter</i>
14/1/00	Plain speaking John takes up poisoned chalice of College
28/1/00	High school head denies shut-out of IW College
24/3/00	Staff cuts likely as college pays back £500,000
12/5/00	Planemaker re-recruits but farm and college jobs go
9/6/00	Major retailer interested in college land
16/6/00	Another 16 college staff to go
7/7/00	DIY store named as IW College partner
8/9/00	More college jobs may go after blunder over financial forecasts
15/9/00	Call for fresh look at an alternative college site
22/9/00	College has no plans to move
6/10/00	DIY store college site plans unveiled
17/11/00	Talk on IW College scheme deemed inappropriate
12/1/01	Mystery of college management job cuts
19/1/01	IW College makes its deputy chief redundant

Figure 6.10
Letters to The County Press with references to the ‘College’

	Positive		Negative		Neutral
	14/5/99		8//5/98		11/9/98
	14/5/99		17/7/98		14/5/99
	14/5/99		2/10/98		28/7/00
	21/5/99		21/5/99		13/10/00
	21/5/99		10/12/99		8/12/00
	28/5/99		14/7/00		
	28/5/99		22/9/00		
	28/5/99		13/10/00		
	4/6/99		13/10/00		
	4/6/99		26/1/01		
	4/6/99		9/2/01		
Total	<u>12</u>		<u>11</u>		<u>5</u>

This chapter’s analysis of the newspaper references gives a comprehensive external view of the college, and indicates the influence of the press on the other stakeholders. This can be exemplified by the national press headlines and stories that are uniformly negative and provide an image of an ineffective college that is repeated in the local press and community.

The aim of the research discussed in the next three chapters is to discover if members of the other stakeholder groups also see the college as being ineffective. In order to discover their views I utilised very different research methods, namely focus groups and repertory grid interviews.

Chapter 7

Exploring Stakeholder Groups

Two central stakeholder groups, new staff and students, were analysed to explore different aspects of the college's effectiveness using the technique of focus groups developed in market research. This technique was utilised partly to explore stakeholders' views in order to triangulate with the other methods of research, but also because a phenomenological focus group provided a social context for the expression of views which was not available with the individual repertory grid interviews and the written questionnaire survey. Interaction between the participants was an essential feature of the interview.

Focus groups are commonly used in market research where they often provide preliminary data that can inform further research (Hines, 2000). This research looked at the group responses in the anticipation that they could go beyond the individual's experience. This was especially hoped for with two of the groups of students (MBA Year 1, and BA Business Studies Year 2) who had been together some time. The other group of students (HND) and the three groups of new staff were not cohesive teams. Nevertheless it was hoped that the opportunity provided by their inductions would 'spark off' some useful insights. Hines (2000) highlights the potential weakness of focus group research where the issues are sensitive, but I minimised this problem by assuring the participants of the confidentiality of the research, and withdrawing from their discussions so that the final data collected was a synthesis of the group's views in each case and could not be associated with any identifiable individual. An associated

difficulty raised by Hines (2000:14) is that 'the group approach may encourage a group response whereas key individuals may hold their own beliefs and views.' However, with this aspect of the research I was positively seeking a group response rather than searching for the constructs of key individuals, as these were uncovered using the repertory grid interviews.

The students' comments were conveyed to the appropriate course tutors during informal discussions. Details of the focus group interviews are in Appendix 5. A synopsis was provided for the Principal and Executive by means of the memorandum reproduced below. This elicited no formal or informal response.

It is worth noting that the original memorandum, along with similar documents included later, were addressed to named individuals and I have changed these names to job titles to increase the level of anonymity.

THE ISLE OF WIGHT COLLEGE

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Principal Y, Vice-Principal, Directors of Finance, Curriculum, HR
From: Peter Lycett
Date: 24 July 2000
Ref:
Subject: Student Perceptions of the College

Please find below a synopsis of a number of interviews carried out with students over the past year. The data was gathered through:

- Individual interviews with college students (full-time GNVQ Business and 'A' level students)
- Individual interviews with potential students
- Group interviews with new students at induction (full-time HND students)
- Group interviews with students at the end of their first year (part-time business and management students)

The group interviews with students at the end of their first year were conducted by asking the students:

- What factors have enhanced the effectiveness of the college?
- What factors have detracted from the college's effectiveness?
- What could enhance the college's effectiveness

The group interviews held at the end of their first induction asked them to identify:

- The negative aspects of their experiences so far
- The positive aspects of their experiences so far
- What could be done to make things better?

The interviews with individual students were more in depth and attempted to determine how they really felt about both the college, and how they saw the college compared to the five high schools and the private school on the Island.

The data has been grouped into three sections, and constitutes my synthesis of the comments made, to avoid repetitions, and eliminate factors outside the control of the college such as the price of beer in the Vine and problems organising a 'dog-sitter'! Whilst the number of individuals and groups interviewed is small and no attempt has been made to make them statistically representative, they may provide you with some interesting comments. The group interviews have had all the positive and negative comments translated into suggestions for improving the college's effectiveness. The individual interviews are perhaps the most interesting and I have highlighted what the students themselves see as the most important features of the college compared to our competitors.

STUDENTS HAVING COMPLETED A YEAR OF THEIR COURSE

Their suggestions for improving the college's effectiveness:

- A more credible image
- Increased dynamism
- Improved information pre-courses
- Better library and IT facilities
- Better rooms, buildings and general facilities
- Cheaper refectory with longer opening hours
- Better feedback when assignments are returned

STUDENTS HAVING COMPLETED A WEEK OF THEIR COURSE

Their suggestions for improving the college:

- Bus passes and better transport deals for older students
- Cheaper refectory prices
- A Student Union bar
- Updated common room
- Improved signposting of rooms
- Better pre-course information
- Greater certainty with timetables
- Lecturers being on time and not finishing early
- Less form filling
- More computers

What they liked so far:

- Informative induction
- Induction activities
- Friendly lecturers and atmosphere
- LRC
- Social life
- A good sense of college community
- Making new friends
- Good facilities
- Being independent
- Being treated as an adult

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVIEWS

These interviews were conducted with students in the most competitive sector of the market, the full-time 'A' level and GNVQ sector.

The college benefits from:

- Treating its students as adults
- A relaxed atmosphere, the absence of school rules and no school uniform

- Greater independence for students
- Wide range of facilities particularly IT
- Location close to transport links

These positive aspects of the college were emphasised by all the interviewees and the college scores highly with them compared to the high schools. However, the poor aspects below were equally emphasised by all the students.

The college is harmed by:

- Its poor reputation, low academic standards and results, particularly with 'A' levels
- Poor reputation with parents
- Physical appearance

FOR THE FUTURE

- I can provide details of the methodology used, and the original data if required
- A report on the perceptions of college staff is being prepared, plus an analysis of a comparison between staff and student perceptions
- I would be happy to circulate these reports to any groups or individuals you think may be informed by the research. I could also give a short presentation to groups such as the Academic Board, the Governors or the Executive to provide a more detailed analysis
- You may like to indicate your preferences for the next cycle of research

The New Staff Inductions

During three induction days held for groups of new staff held on 2 November 1999, 15 November 2000 and 12 July 2000, I took the opportunity to explore with them their first impressions of the college, both positive and negative. A total of 33 staff participated in the two inductions.

At the end of each induction day the participants were split into small groups and asked to discuss their impressions of the college and to write down the results of their deliberations onto 'post-it' notes which were then displayed on the wall for the other group(s) to read before returning to their group to revise their initial observations if they wished to.

As a result of these three staff inductions I synthesised the results in the form of the memorandum to the Principal and Executive reproduced below. Details of the staff focus groups are in Appendix 5.

THE ISLE OF WIGHT COLLEGE

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Principal Y, Vice-Principal, Directors of HR, Finance, Curriculum
From: Peter Lycett
Date: 25 July 2000
Ref:
Subject: New Staff Perceptions of the College

During the past year I have organised three induction days for new staff, and at the end of each day, in addition to the 'usual' course evaluation forms I have asked the staff to engage in an exercise of sharing their positive and negative impressions of the college. Essentially the staff co-operated in small group interviews, which increased the degree of anonymity and hopefully of honesty, although their being with other people, often strangers, plus the knowledge that I was to receive their final comments, albeit in anonymous written form may have diminished the degree of honesty.

Whilst the comments are wide-ranging and diverse, reflecting perhaps their status and length of time at the college, there are some recurring themes, which may inform your strategy for, the college and the changes required for improvement. I have highlighted these common themes below, but if have also attached the complete data for your information.

Recurring positive comments about the college:

- Helpful and friendly staff
- Good atmosphere
- Staff development opportunities
- Induction
- LRC

Recurring negative comments about the college:

- Buildings, rooms etc, including staff accommodation
- Communications
- Internal politics
- Poor initial induction and information

I took the opportunity to raise the issues outlined in this memorandum in informal discussions with individual members of the college executive, but received no formal reply or acknowledgement of the memorandum.

Conclusion

A problem identified by Cameron (1986) is that the determinants of effectiveness often get confused with indicators of effectiveness, and consequently I need to be clear about what is being analysed with these group interviews. They are largely concerned with process issues and may be considered as determinants of effectiveness, and they certainly don't match the performance indicators used by the FEFC in measuring a college's effectiveness, five of which are output measures, and one is an efficiency measure.

These group interviews are important to this research, not just because of the light they throw on the two groups' views about the college and what this tells me about the college's effectiveness, but also because of the executive's reaction to this data, or rather lack of reaction. This absence of a response encouraged me, in the spirit of action enquiry, to shift the emphasis of the research away from an examination of all the main stakeholder groups, towards a deeper exploration of the key stakeholders and the central role leadership plays in promoting or inhibiting change. These themes are explored further in the next two chapters, which utilises repertory grid interviews to reveal people's core constructs about the college, and in the chapters that deal with staff attitudes, culminating with the chapter on leadership.

Chapter 8

Stakeholders' Personal Constructs

He is not the victim of the pie, but of his notions of etiquette under which the pie cutting has been subsumed.

George Kelly 1955

In order to assess the effectiveness of the College, I wanted to see how the major stakeholders saw the College and to reveal people's core constructs about the college. Some of the perceptions and general and particular views held by the stakeholders have been explored in the previous chapters. However, I also wanted to challenge the picture of ineffectiveness that was emerging, by enquiring much more deeply into the views of a small number of stakeholders. To this end the Repertory Grid technique was used to see how the respondents perceived the college 'world'. The technique provides a much more robust form of research than that provided by even the most structured of interviews. The repertory grid and its accompanying interview is a tool created by George Kelly (1955) for exploring his Personal Construct Theory. This theory provides an appropriate research methodology as it allowed each individual interviewed to create his or her own way of seeing the College, ie neither the College nor myself creates the world for the individual. Because a Repertory Grid Interview allows the respondent to develop their own constructs, they decide what is important to them and the individual develops any construct relating to effectiveness. Other forms of interview and survey techniques nearly always contain the researcher's preconceptions about the topic. Whilst I have my own way of seeing the College, which I also explored using a Repertory Grid, I did not want to impose it on others. A further advantage of Repertory

Grid interviews is that the constructs created could show how the same events could be viewed differently, and potentially how these perceptions could be built up into meaningful patterns.

The Repertory Grid technique was chosen as one of the research methodologies as an alternative to the traditional methods of studying people's perceptions and perspectives, for example by questionnaire, interview or structured group discussion, although these techniques were also deployed later in the research, particularly the use of an in-depth questionnaire during the second cycle of research.

The Repertory Grid Interview was also chosen as a contrast to more traditional methods, such as the questionnaire and structured interview, which enabled me to collect data from a statistically significant number of subjects. This type of large-scale survey was undertaken with the staff survey (analysed in the next two chapters) that elicited data from a high proportion of staff, resulting in a large-scale quantitative and qualitative study. These surveys have the disadvantage of potentially being affected by my influencing the subjects' responses by means of the questions asked. The language and criteria would have been determined by me as the 'expert' researcher, and might be alien to the subjects' own personal construct system and, therefore be misunderstood by the subjects. Consequently the Repertory Grid technique was selected as a particularly sensitive instrument by which people can construe their personal theories of how they relate to the College, and how they construe it as part of their educational world or whatever aspect of their life it resides in, without my influence, or at least with the minimum of influence.

George Kelly wanted to develop a theory, and an investigative technique, which would remove the influence of the observer or interviewer's frame of reference on what was observed. The theory is a reflexive one in that I too have a construct system relating to the College, but I accept that others have their own system that is different in content from my own. I have to accept that there is no one right view of the College and I must try not to impose my construct system on the interviewees. Each individual is an expert on his or her own construct system. I hope that I adhered to this precept throughout the research. The Repertory Grid Interview provides a technique that enables the respondent's worldview to be revealed, explored and recorded. The theory and technique grew out of Kelly's work as an applied psychologist. The use of the Grid technique has been refined in recent years, but is still largely based upon Kelly's theories.

George Kelly was a clinical psychologist who lived between 1905 and 1967. He published a two-volume work defining his Personal Construct Psychology in 1955, and went on to publish a large number of papers further developing the theory, many of which have been issued in collected form by Maher (1969). Kelly was working on a second book when he died, and only the preface has been published (Kelly, 1970) and he also began to become involved with the computer simulation of personality (Kelly, 1963). This is especially interesting in the light of my use of the Repertory Grid software 'Enquire Within', although Kelly was interested in using the computer as a psychological model rather than as a research tool.

Kelly was an engineer before becoming a clinical psychologist, and this imbues his psychology, as it takes both the previous European logical positivism and American pragmatism approaches, and is similar to cognitive science. His impatience with the patronising attitude of most clinical psychologists whom he depicted as utilising their 'expert' knowledge about human function and dysfunction, which they would then communicate to the ignorant lay person. Kelly saw the role of the therapist as radically different, and in this he was one of the first person-centred psychotherapists: he took the view that if you want to know what's wrong with someone, you should ask them, as they probably know (Kelly, 1955).

This approach had great appeal for me as a researcher wanting to know what people thought about the College. However, his theory and Repertory Grid Technique provided me with the opportunity to explore much more about how people construed their 'college world'. The Repertory Grid itself is a geometrical representation of a person's understanding of part of their world. Kelly represented his theory as, 'a geometry of psychological space' (Kelly, 1969) and the Repertory Grid is the visible expression of this concept.

Kelly's 'fundamental postulate' for personal construct psychology was that:

"A person's processes are psychologically channelised by the way in which he anticipates events".

(Kelly, 1955:46)

He saw all people as 'personal scientists' who anticipate the world and that:

"A person anticipates events by construing their replications."
(Kelly, 1955:50)

He saw people as driven by the need to cope with coming events in their world and that all aspects of behaviour derived from this. The consequence for my research was that this provided a model for expressing the stakeholders' view of the College, if, as it seemed reasonable to assume, the College forms a significant part of the participants' worlds. The Repertory Grid interviews were used with students, senior managers, the Principal, lecturers, support staff and prospective students, all of who had singular construct systems relating to the College. Kelly argued that our construct systems reflect our constant attempts to make sense of our world, and just like scientists make sense of their subject matter, we also observe, draw conclusions about the patterns or paradigms of cause and effect, and then we behave according to those conclusions. This concept of people as 'personal scientist' drawing conclusions has great appeal for me in trying to discover how the major stakeholders viewed the College, and hopefully by implication how effective the College was in meeting their aspirations or at least replicating their constructs.

A person's construct system represents their truth, as they understand it, so there was no attempt by me to impose my value systems or views of the College on the subjects. Obviously there was always an unstated political and power relationship between myself and the respondents, which I will return to later. However, essentially Personal Construct Theory and the Repertory Grid interview is as free from interviewer bias as it is possible to be. Despite its almost formal geometric structure it involves no pre-determined questions that attempted or could be seen to attempt to impose my construct system on the subjects. Whilst I might have wanted to confront some of the constructs that were expressed or the surrounding views, I didn't! At least I believe that I didn't

explicitly. Instead I accepted that their construct system worked for them, and was therefore valid and a reflection of the fact that they had had different experiences, especially of the College, different reactions and thus see the College differently from myself.

Brown (1992) suggested that there might be general differences between alternative approaches to knowledge elicitation, including repertory grids. She highlighted a relatively high degree of formality and repetitiveness in the technique as the interviewee has to systematically contrast the different elements; rank the elements and then 'ladder up and down'. My experience was that the technique was a much more flexible method of interviewing, and proved to be a liberating experience for most interviewees. Its repetitiveness only became a drawback with some of the 'laddering' techniques.

Some of the constructs developed by the participants were inconsistent with one another, or were counter to the 'objective facts', but I had to accept that people can and do live with a degree of internal inconsistency within their construct systems. As the interviews were thankfully not part of a programme of psychological therapy, I had no brief or even desire to challenge any of these inconsistencies, and equally thankfully none of them appeared worryingly extreme to me.

One of the many questions I had to ask myself was, 'to what extent can I understand another person's construct system?' Kelly conceived the construct systems as multi-dimensional mathematical and geometric models in which the subject's own language is used to clarify his or her own experience. Consequently as long as I shared a common

language, had a degree of empathy and had a shared understanding of at least the framework of what their College world was, I could gain an understanding of other people's construct systems.

It is the methodology that Kelly devised, namely the Repertory Grid Interview, which provides the key to unlocking people's construct paradigms. The term 'repertory' derives from 'repertoire'- ie the repertoire or range of constructs that a person develops. Kelly (1970) pictured these constructs as existing in Euclidian geometry, a number of planes slicing through events that divide a person's psychological space. He stated that constructs are essentially judgemental or evaluative, they are scalar, eg the term 'near' can only exist in contrast to the term 'far'; or in the case of one of my interviewees 'treat you like an adult' contrasted with 'treat you like a school child.' Kelly claimed that this contrast defines the dichotomous poles of the construct with the elements at each pole like one another with respect to the construct and unlike the elements at the other pole. The first step in the Repertory Grid interview is to determine a set of elements. Elements are the concrete examples of the world or domain I wanted to explore. When Kelly was originally researching and writing he was developing a theory of individual and group psychological and social processes, and usually used elements drawn from the subjects' 'significant others', often members of their family or close friends. At other times they might be 'significant others' drawn from colleagues at work. However, I wanted to explore people's constructs of the College, rather than of individuals, consequently I wanted the College to be one of the concrete elements. I could have allowed the participants to develop their own element set, presumably including the College, but I chose instead to provide the element set. The elements selected were the

seven providers of post-compulsory education on the Island, namely the high schools and the college. These were selected because I thought that they would provide a common frame of reference for the participants to then explore their constructs. It also enabled me to produce more meaningful comparisons and analysis. This was particularly important because a key aspect of an organisation's effectiveness is how it is perceived compared to its main competitors, how they are seen compared to one another and the basis for making a choice of, in this case, school or college. It also enabled the participants to articulate why their descriptions and constructs were so important to them.

Principal Y, the part time lecturer and the external consultant provided the exceptions in terms of the element set. I encouraged them to develop their own individual sets of elements based upon other colleges they had worked in, but also including the college. This provided valuable data about how the college's effectiveness compared with other colleges, and what might be the causes of the effectiveness/ineffectiveness. I also doubted that they would have sufficient knowledge of the Island's schools to develop enough meaningful constructs.

There are also five Repertory Grid Interviews carried out by a senior manager colleague and myself which used the other senior managers as the element set. As members of staff were often very critical of the college's management (see the FEDA Staff Satisfaction Survey results in the following two chapters), the data was used to further examine the college's management as a potential cause of its ineffectiveness. My colleague was carrying out a small-scale piece of research into team working amongst

the senior managers, for an assignment on a master's programme, and kindly allowed me to use the data. However, the majority of the Repertory Grid Interviews used the same element set.

I selected the element set because initially I wanted to increase the opportunity to compare the subjects' constructs and so develop conclusions and recommendations about the degree of effectiveness of the College and actions that could take place to improve the effectiveness. However, the reality proved to be both less clear-cut, and more interesting and useful. Nevertheless the intention initially was to partially use the data from the Repertory Grid Interviews in a quantifiable way as well as in a qualitative way.

The geography of the Isle of Wight and the probable shared basic knowledge of post-sixteen education on the Island provided a clear set of elements, namely the seven main providers of post-sixteen full time education. Although I initially selected the element set in the belief that people on the Island could develop constructs based upon the school and the college and so provide illuminating data, I was quite prepared to allow and indeed positively encourage the participants to change the elements if they had wanted to in order to develop more meaningful constructs. However, none of them found any difficulties in using the pre-determined element set, nor did anyone request a desire to change the elements. The selected elements were: the College, the five state High Schools (the Island unusually has retained a three tier school system with First, Middle and High schools) and the largest private school (there are some other small private

education providers, but I felt they were insignificant because the respondents would be unlikely to have much knowledge of them).

The seven elements in the set were:

Carisbrooke High School

Sandown High School

Medina High School

Cowes High School

Ryde High School

The Isle of Wight College

Ryde with Upper Chine (a private school, hereafter referred to as Ryde Private)

The element set proved to be very successful in eliciting constructs and much rich data during the interviews.

The interviewees or participants selected for the interviews were not chosen on a statistically representative basis. I simply wanted to explore how a number of stakeholders constructed their college world, in order to see if there were lessons to be learnt. The people were selected as a purposive sample to represent the key internal stakeholders. This sampling strategy helped to maximise the diversity of participants within the potential population of the stakeholder groups, and thus ensure that the research was embedded in the real world (Hirschman 1986, Maykut and Morehouse 1994). They were also a group of people I expected would have an important story to tell, because they were significant members of the College community. None of the

selected interviewees declined to engage in the process, at least initially. The interviewees are coded RG1-RG14 for those carried out by myself where the elements are post-sixteen education providers and RGA-RGF where the elements comprised the then Heads of Department, of which four were carried out by one of their number. The interviewees comprised:

Interviewee	Status
RG1 & 2	Full time College students
RG3	High School student
RG4, 5 & 6	Full time College lecturers
RG7	Head of Department
RG8	Vice-Principal
RG9	Part time College lecturer
RG10	Full time support staff
RG11	Full time College lecturer
RG12	External consultant
RG13	Principal
RG14	Director of Human Resources
RG A, B, C, E, F	Heads of Department

Of the nineteen Repertory Grid Interviews the first fourteen, which are displayed in the chronological order in which they occurred, all explored the respondents' views of the College as a whole and how it was construed in relation to either the schools on the Island (interviewees 1 to 8 and 10 and 11) or other colleges or organisations (interviewees 9, 12, 13 and 14).

It might initially appear strange that no attempt was made to select a statistically significant or representative sample, but if each person's 'Personal Construct' is unique, such statistical considerations are inappropriate. That is not to say that we cannot attempt to draw generalised conclusions from the interviews. There is some debate over whether Personal Construct Psychology is a theory or a complete psychology. Jahoda (1988) suggests that Kelly has both an approach and a theory. She defines an approach as

“a relatively content free point of view about how best to proceed in studying people. It is based on extra-scientific assumptions and often incorporates personal values. It contains the fundamental questions to which a psychologist seeks answers. In contrast to theories, an approach can therefore neither be verified nor falsified: you can only take it or leave it.”

(Jahoda 1988:2)

I was less concerned with the debate about whether or not Kelly had expressed an approach or a theory. What really was important to me was that Personal Construct Theory (Psychology) is 'relatively content free', and that it asks 'fundamental questions'. Although the ways in which we construe our experiences and our paradigms, may as Fransella (1990) points out, make us 'prisoners by the way we construe our biography', this aspect was less important to my research compared to what it revealed about people's views of the College. Another core element of personal construct psychology is 'reflexivity'. Tindall expresses what makes reflexivity so appropriate for action research:

“The richness and relevance of the personal experience of all is acknowledged and validated. Both researcher and participants are involved in interacting and construing. The aim of the research is to engage in collaborative exploration of equality and mutuality to gain an insider’s view of the participant’s reality, at the same time acknowledging that the research question is necessarily part of the researcher’s construct system.”

(Tindall, 1994:74)

My acceptance of the ‘richness and relevance’ of the interviewees’ constructs helped them produce the ensuing rich and meaningful data. Each interview commenced with me introducing the broad purpose of the research, namely to obtain from individuals their views and perceptions of the College, and that these perceptions would be obtained through their exploration of their view of the College in relation to the other post-sixteen providers of education on the Island, namely the High Schools and Ryde Private, or in relation to other colleges or organisations they knew. I would then briefly outline Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory (I tried not to use the word Psychology in case it put them off!) and the Repertory Grid technique, and if using the ‘Enquire Within’ software on the laptop, how that worked. Using the computer during the interviews had a number of advantages. It provided an instant record of the grid and the process of construct elicitation. It made the techniques of ‘laddering’ easier (see below), whereby the participants were encouraged to explore down to their core beliefs and to explain why their constructs were so important to them. The weighting of constructs, assigning values to the elements and the ability to continually revise, amend and delete was very valuable. Finally the software helped in the immediate provision of a grid for joint

analysis and discussion with the participants. However, its disadvantages were that it is not completely user-friendly, it could prove distracting or even off-putting to some participants (although this was not the case in my experience), and unless used sensitively it could become prescriptive and a barrier to the organic development of the interview (although again I did not find this). One disadvantage I did find was that initially it distracted me to a small extent at the outset of the interview, but this disadvantage was easily compensated for by the overwhelming advantages.

I also explained to the interviewees that the interviews would be confidential, and that they would not be identified in the final thesis. This led to difficulties later with some interviews when the interviewees' identity was either obvious or central to the importance of the analysis of their interview, and the implication of this appears later.

Construct elicitation commenced with me spreading seven cards in front of the interviewee each containing the name of the College or one of the schools. They were then asked to take the elements (cards) in groups of three whilst asking themselves the question 'in what way are any two of these similar to each other and different from the third?' This produced the bipolar scales, for example, good inspection report – poor inspection report, and it is these scales that became the constructs. Kelly defines the word construct precisely and explains how it differs from the more conventional term 'concept'. He discusses this in the following terms:

"We use the term construct in a manner which is somewhat parallel to the common usage of 'concept'. However, if one attempts to translate our construct into the more familiar term, 'concept', he may find some

confusion. We have included, as indeed some recent users of the term 'concept' have done, the more concretistic concepts which nineteenth century psychologists would have insisted on calling 'percepts'. The notion of 'percepts' has always carried the idea of its being a personal act – in that sense, our construct is the tradition of 'percepts'. But we also see our construct as involving abstraction – in that sense our construct bears a resemblance to the traditional usage of 'concept'... Now when we assume that the construct is basically dichotomous, that it includes percepts, and that it is a better term for our purposes than the term 'concept, we are not quarrelling with those who would use it otherwise. Within some systems of logic the notion of contrast as something distinct from irrelevancy is not part of the assumptive structure. We, on the other hand are simply assuming that this is the way people do, in fact, think.”

(Kelly, 1955:70)

He is arguing that the idea of a construct is both abstract and a real description of how people think. The development of the bipolar constructs and the acceptance that 'this is the way people do, in fact, think', forms the basic theory upon which the Repertory Grid Interview draws its validity, and what makes the interviews and their analysis so powerful. Kelly claimed that his 'dichotomy corollary' states that:

“A person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs.”

(Kelly, 1955:59)

Consequently during the Repertory Grid Interviews I would ask the interviewees to keep selecting three cards (schools and/or the College), and to say how they found any two similar and the third different. This proved to be very productive and elicited large numbers of constructs, and even when the number of constructs was low or they were very prosaic factual constructs, eg in Newport, not in Newport, this revealed things about their interaction with the College or willingness, or lack of willingness, to reveal their true constructs. The process of construct elicitation continued in each interview until the interviewee could find no more constructs ie the 'finite number' had been reached. However, during the interviews, they were given the opportunity to add new constructs, as well as delete or amend existing constructs.

The constructs were either written down on a pre-printed grid containing the selected elements, or were entered directly into the 'Enquire Within' software. The grid itself is important, not just because it provides a record of the constructs, and reveals the opportunity to refine the constructs until the interviewee reveals his or her 'core constructs', but also because it represents the geometrical view which Kelly had of people's psychological space. The grid displays one of the planes through which people represent their worlds. The grid diagram itself is a logical semantic work according to Gaines(1991). In other words it is a physical representation of how people see their worlds, and by viewing it, particularly with the help of the 'Enquire Within' software, they can assess and if necessary adapt this visualisation.

The next stage in the Repertory Grid Interviews was to ask the interviewees to rate all the elements (College and schools) against all the constructs, but this was only done

once the interviewee was happy with the constructs, and had had the opportunity to refine or delete constructs. This process became much easier with the use of the 'Enquire Within' software.

The interviewees rated each of the elements against the constructs using a five-point scale. Each end of the construct was defined as 1 or 5. They went through each of the elements, selecting the appropriate rating for each. It was emphasised to the interviewees that there was no requirement to use all the numbers and that the same numbers could be allocated to more than one element. It was further emphasised that 1 did not equate to 'good' and a rating of 5 to 'bad', or vice versa. However, in some interviews a good/bad dichotomy did emerge and we attempted to re-order the constructs with all the 'good' aspects on one axis. However, this did not prove to be very successful, as not all the constructs were 'good/bad, and the re-ordering started to change the emphasis given to the other constructs, and as a result the process was stopped (see also 'laddering down below').

If a construct did not apply to a particular element, then the interviewees could use the 'not applicable' option. This option was not encouraged because it indicated that the construct required more refinement. Consequently interviewees selecting 'not applicable' were encouraged to divide the constructs into two, or to redefine them and so rate all the elements against them.

Once the elements had been rated (against a five point scale) a matrix had therefore been formed which could then be analysed. The matrix represented the person's construct

system in the area of enquiry ie the College and schools on the Island, or other colleges or organisations known to the interviewee, the language which he or she uses when thinking about the College and the other elements, and the way that language is used to classify the College and other elements. The 1-5 ordinal scale used allowed a degree of subtlety to be brought into the analysis, but it must be remembered that no inherent meaning is carried by the numbers, they simply provided a means for the interviewees to position the elements in relative terms on each of the construct dimensions, thus revealing a richer picture. The resulting analysis is still avowedly qualitative, despite the incursion of numbers!

Laddering Up

The grids were further refined using the two techniques of Laddering up and Laddering down. These techniques were first developed by Hinkle (1965), and allow the interviewee to refine the constructs. I did not use the technique with all the interviewees, because as Rowe (1988) showed, they are techniques that need to be used cautiously and wisely, and only when the interviewee is willing and keen to gain a deeper understanding. Sometimes I felt that the techniques would not be appreciated, or would meet resistance, whilst with other interviewees they seemed unnecessary as the initial construct elicitation appeared to reveal enough rich material. Some interviewees would start the laddering processes but become impatient with them, so I would stop them so as not to spoil the interview by pushing for a level of revelation that caused them discomfort. One very interesting aspect of laddering was the paradox created by the manually elicited grid using paper and pencil versus the computer-generated grid.

This was brought about because the purely paper grid was not flexible enough to cope easily with the changes resulting from laddering, but it did allow for the required degree of flexibility in the interviewing technique which laddering requires. Meanwhile the computer program provided the ease with which the constructs could be altered, but was so mechanistic and occasionally time-consuming in its operation, that it tended to discourage the interviewee.

Laddering enables the interviewee to delve more deeply, for instance if they have only elicited surface or subordinate constructs that are not so generally applicable, and where the aim is to reveal the core constructs. Often the subordinate constructs are sufficient, but laddering provides the opportunity to the interviewees to elaborate a more personal framework of constructs, and enables them to identify which of the revealed constructs are more important, thus offering a better understanding of how the person frames their reality.

With laddering up, I asked the interviewee 'which pole of the construct is preferred?' I also asked them 'why is this an important construct or distinction to make about the elements (College and schools)?' This process should have taken the interviewee closer to their core constructs – those deeply held values and beliefs that the interviewees hold about the College (for example see the interview with RG8).

Laddering Down

With laddering down I asked the interviewees to reconsider each of the constructs and to refine them by re-stating how one pole of the construct differed from the other. These laddering techniques met with mixed success as is explained in the analysis of the individual interviews. The laddering down technique is also called pyramiding (Landfield 1971), but whatever name is applied to it, it did not generally prove to be successful. On the positive side, this could be because the interviews were sufficiently open and enjoyable for the interviewees, so that they were able to display their core constructs and the reasons for their importance quite easily. The re-arrangement and reversal of some of the poles eg by placing all the 'good' poles on the same side also proved to be of only partial benefit. In particular it only appeared useful when the bipolarity reflected a 'good/bad' relationship, and I found that re-ordering those constructs with, for instance, all the good poles on the left, meant that the non good/bad constructs looked distorted in their meaning, as the left hand pole took on a positive aspect, whilst the right hand pole suddenly appeared negative, which gave a completely false impression of the meaning of those constructs.

Analysing the Repertory Grid Interviews

Repertory Grid Interviews and Personal Construct Theory emphasise the psychology of the individual; and as all the stakeholders are also individuals, they provide an appropriate methodology and method for exploring people's views of the college and reasons for its effectiveness, or ineffectiveness. The Repertory Grid Interview was developed as a tool of clinical psychology. Therefore its

usefulness in the field of management research is in revealing and exploring individual views of the organisation's effectiveness. I could have used the interviews to examine each participant's views in isolation. Indeed Rychlak (1990) emphasises that Personal Construct Theory deals with individuals as agents of their own actions, shaping themselves by attaching personal meanings to what is going on rather than being shaped via social constructions (in this case the College). However, I believe that social constructions cannot be avoided, and that individual/social distinctions are unhelpful, and that important organisational (social) conclusions can be drawn from the interviews when they are considered with a variety of other sources of evidence. Therefore I felt comfortable in analysing the commonality and differences expressed by the interviewees/participants. Kelly's individualistic standpoint does not preclude me from construing aspects of the college's effectiveness from a group viewpoint (Fransella 1984).

By using either the same element set or one that always included the college I was able to compare the college with schools on the island and other colleges. Also with the Heads of Department interviews the same individuals formed the element sets enabling me to make valid comparisons. Even if one was unconvinced of the ability of the Repertory Grid analysis to be able to generalise about groups within the College, the Grid interview would still provide an excellent format for a semi-structured interview, with the minimum of interviewer bias, and a tremendous opportunity for the interviewee to reveal their core opinions about the College.

The interviews were analysed in a number of ways. As Coshall (1991) notes, there is a variety of ways in which patterns in the grids can be identified. Advanced statistical techniques such as hierarchical cluster analysis and principal components analysis can be used to identify interrelationships within a full grid (Sparrow and Bushell 1997). Other more qualitative analyses (Jenkins and Johnson 1997) have used more inductive approaches including visual mapping of the grids. By using both quantitative and qualitative analysis including computer-generated correlations I continued to engage in a process of mixed methodologies. The most straightforward of the methods of analysis, was to simply count the number of constructs each interviewee revealed. The more experience people have with the subject matter, the more constructs they are likely to have. This provides a rough guide as to how important the College is to a person, but caution must be observed in drawing any firm conclusion from small differences in the number of constructs elicited by different individuals.

The second method of analysis used was the content analysis of the elements, and in the case of three of the interviewees, a content analysis of the elements selected (this would obviously not have been appropriate when I pre-selected the element set). The content analysis involved looking for themes that occurred, or didn't occur. Content analysis was combined with the language used and comments made during the interviews that I recorded in notes taken during the interviews and written up the same day, in addition to the words used in the constructs which were recorded either on the paper grids for the early interviews or on the laptop.

Thirdly each Repertory Grid was converted into a matrix that was analysed statistically. The matrices were generated by the computer program Enquire Within which the software authors describe as a 'self-administered computer platform'. Again, using their words, it 'is a new, interactive Windows-based application which enables you to develop a complete, rigorous map of you own, or someone else's perceptions and judgements about any topic of which the user has some experience'. The 'map' is the correlation tree, which shows the relationships between the elements and the constructs, produced by the program at the end of the Repertory Grid process. Use of the software proved to be generally advantageous to the process of the Repertory Grid Interviews and very advantageous in analysing the resulting grids. The correlations showed the participant and myself which school or college was seen to be most like the college. In fact it enabled us to explore the relationships among all the elements and those between the constructs. Therefore we could see if the college was perceived by the participant to be most like school X and how each was rated against the constructs, which institution was rated highly and why, and thus she/he could explore issues of effectiveness (without the term necessarily ever being used), and providing data for me to analyse later. From this the participants could again reconsider and refine their constructs, if they so wished. The initial interviews carried out without the software, have been subsequently entered onto the program for ease of analysis.

Enquire Within enabled me to explore the interviewees' current understanding of the College in relation to other educational establishments and to then challenge them to delve broader and deeper until they had no more constructs to add or amend. This

indicates, according to Kelly, that at that moment in time, their college world had been fully explored.

Once the constructs had been elicited, I encouraged the interviewees to ladder up, by using the question ‘re-considering the construct, why is that an important distinction to make about the College and schools (or colleges)?’ This enabled the interviewees to continue to refine their constructs and consider their importance up to the point that they could not express the core construct any differently. It is suggested by the authors of the ‘Enquire Within’ software that the question of the construct’s importance is only asked a maximum of three times, but I found that occasionally interviewees wanted to refine their construct further. However, more usually they did not need to ladder up, as they felt that they had captured all the important reasons behind their preferences.

An alternative way of laddering up was also used, by asking the interviewees to choose which pole of the construct is preferred, and to give the reason why. This process was not often pursued, as it did not prove to be popular with the interviewees, who seemed to find it caused unnecessary delays. Similarly, laddering down, which asked the interviewees to give an example of how the College or school, described as one pole of the construct, differs from those described as the opposite pole in terms of their importance to the interviewee, was not used fully in all the interviews, although it was attempted in most of them. There are two other laddering down prompts in the program, but they proved to be equally limited in their use, as the interviewees found it relatively

easy to both refine and to express the reasons for the importance of the constructs, without the rather plodding, mechanistic prompts provided by the software.

Once the constructs had been fully elicited, the interviewees were asked to rate each element on each construct continuum. As previously stated, the rating scale chosen was 1 to 5. I did experiment initially with a seven-point scale but it proved to be unnecessarily finely graded and created a degree of numerical refinement that wasn't really there. A five-point scale was sufficient for differentiation to occur. The interviewees were informed that a rating of one did not necessarily equate to 'good' and a rating of five to 'bad', and that they simply referred to the proximity to either pole. If a construct did not apply to a particular element, the interviewee could use a 'Not Applicable' option. This did not happen very often, but when it was initially used it provided a prompt to re-consider and re-define the constructs.

Once all the elements had been rated against the final group of constructs the program was instructed to produce a graph like the one in Appendix 3.

This is a graphical representation of Enquire Within's analysis of the interviewee's matrix. The elements are on the horizontal scale, and the constructs on the vertical scale. The program has a 'spy glass' facility enabling you to read the names of the elements and the constructs, but only on an individual basis. Unfortunately the program won't display all the elements and constructs in words on the matrix screens. However, they are included with each of the individual Repertory Grid Interview analyses. The scale on the far top left of the matrix runs from 100 backwards. This scale represents the strength of correlation of the elements. Similarly to the right of the matrix there is a

scale that runs from 100 backwards from left to right, and this represents the strength of correlation of the constructs.

The position and relationship of the elements and constructs to one another forms an important part of this analysis, and is more than just a visual representation. Shaw and Gaines (1992) draw a particularly interesting analogy:

“There is an analogy between the visual language and the representation of chemical structures as atoms and bonds. Distinctions are the atomic primitives in personal construct psychology, and further constructions may be seen as complex ‘molecules’ formed by distinctions joined through subsumption and disjoint bonds”.

(Shaw and Gaines, 1992:23)

The elements and constructs in the Enquire Within program matrices are re-sorted so that the two most closely correlated elements are next to one another. It then marks above these two elements a point representing how closely they are correlated. Two lines are drawn downwards connecting these elements and creating a new virtual element from the ‘marriage’ of the two original elements and a number is assigned to this new virtual element at their point of correlation. This is carried out for all the elements to create a ‘tree’ above the matrix, showing the elements in families based on how closely they are correlated. These trees were discussed with the interviewees as they described how the College’s ratings against the constructs were correlated in relation to the construct ratings applied to the Island’s schools, or other colleges, and which institutions they saw as being similar or dissimilar, and this often led to further

useful discussions. The trees also show if any of the elements were seen as not similar to any other elements in the grid.

The program carries out the same process of correlation, re-ordering and the tree creation with the constructs. This tree is shown on the right hand side of the matrix. Again it calculates which two are most closely correlated, places them together, adding virtual constructs until all the correlations amongst the constructs are bi-polar, the Enquire Within program also calculates whether any construct would be a better fit if it were reversed.

The physical closeness and relationship of the elements and constructs allows the interviewee to see how they express the concepts of this particular part of their world. The meaning of their concepts is expressed in how they use that concept in relation to other elements. For example, to describe the College as 'treats you like an adult' has meaning in relation to the schools that do not treat you in this way and are described as 'treats you like a school child'. The analysis goes further than this, it points to the elements which the interviewee sees in the same way as one another, and those constructs which are used in a similar fashion to one another. The grid and accompanying trees are reminiscent of Kelly's model of psychological space.

The correlations are initially set at 95%, but this figure can be altered, although I did not find any benefit in doing so. The next stage in the analysis is 'differentiation', which enabled the interviewees to further refine the constructs and the element relationships. This was done by showing them which ones are closely correlated and asking them 'do

you see the elements (named schools and/or College) as being very similar?' The interviewee was then able to agree that the relationship expressed fitted their view, or to reject it and think of new constructs that differentiated the two elements and thereby reduced the amount by which they were correlated.

The program also enabled the interviewee to re-consider the relationships between the constructs and to see if they wanted to further differentiate between them. These differentiation processes were found to be of limited use, probably because the elements themselves were particularly concrete examples that enabled the interviewees to explore and develop their constructs without the need to differentiate them. It is also worth emphasising that each interview took a minimum of two hours and often involved a high degree of in-depth self-examination on the part of the interviewee. This meant that by the end of the interview they were almost drained and often reluctant to re-define concepts that had become clear enough to them. Differentiation was a refinement too far for most interviewees. It was my function, as the interviewer to identify when the interview had reached an appropriate conclusion, knowing that whilst a repertory grid interview and the Enquire Within session could continue indefinitely, even the most generous of interviewees would only allocate so much time to an interview. I did consider re-interviewing each person on a further occasion and using the second interview as an opportunity to re-visit the grid and carry out further differentiation of the elements and constructs, but decided that more important data would be gathered from additional interviewees, rather than from re-interviewing the same people. This decision was relatively easy to make, because the Repertory Grid Interview allows the interviewee to reach their core constructs and to identify them to the interviewer. In

effect once the geometric picture had been drawn up there seemed little need or enthusiasm to refine it. The use of construct theory and Repertory Grid interviews when used to show whether or not relationships have changed over time, do require one or more follow-up interviews, but I did not feel that was required when exploring organisations.

Some care needs to be taken in interpreting the grids. The trees represent sets of correlations on just two dimensions, and the program places the most closely correlated elements and constructs close to one another in the trees. Subsequently it becomes a matter of chance as to their positioning next to one another. This means that I could not draw any conclusions from the distance between elements, or constructs; ie those elements further from one another are not seen as less like one another. What can be interpreted though is whether or not they are adjacent to one another and where they appear in the family trees.

Whilst the major purpose of the Repertory Grid interviews was obviously to generate the constructs, grids and correlations that would inform my exploration of the college's effectiveness and the resulting analysis, they had the parallel purpose of providing a framework and perhaps an excuse for an interview. Consequently the insights gathered around the grid interview, and the comments made were often as interesting as the grid interview itself. Following two trial interviews with family members, just to practise the grid technique, and a third trial interview to practise the use of the Enquire Within software (incidentally none of which are included in the data), it became clear that the whole interview would provide a rich source of data for analysis. To this end, I made

notes throughout each interview, after first informing the interviewee of my intention to do so. Time was spent at the start of each interview explaining and agreeing the purpose of the interview. Some interviewees initially would only produce simple factual constructs or propositional constructs for example, 'in Newport/not in Newport', and I would then spend time rephrasing the qualifiers to encourage more evaluative constructs.

Once I started using the laptop and Enquire Within software in the interviews, I had to decide whether or not to encourage the interviewees to operate the computer themselves. Some interviewees enjoyed using it themselves, and the technical aspect appeared to make it easier for them to reveal their evaluative constructs and other views about the College. However, other interviewees preferred me to operate the laptop as they found the technology a distraction, but all the interviewees were encouraged to see how the process developed on-screen. Whilst the interview process described appears to take a linear pre-determined sequential form, in fact the interviews were much more flexible with some going backwards and forwards through the program, some including laddering, others including differentiation, whilst others finished after the construct elicitation and element rating.

The constructs are displayed after each interview. An example of a correlation tree is shown in Appendix 3.

The Repertory Grid Interviews

Interview 1: RG1

RG1 was a first year 'A' level student in the College. The interview took place on 3.6.99.

RG1 was the first person to be interviewed using the Repertory Grid technique. The purpose of the research, namely to discover how he perceived the College and the Island's schools, in order to identify changes which could be made to improve the effectiveness of the college, were explained, as was the commitment to anonymity and a brief outline of the Repertory Grid technique. It was emphasised that there were no correct responses, or 'right' way of viewing this aspect of his world, and that his comments would be treated with the utmost confidence.

After some general questions about his time at college and previous school, the Repertory Grid was explained in more detail. The elements were to be the institutions delivering post-16 education. Subject A was asked to select those schools and colleges that he had considered attending and those schools and colleges that he could have considered, but chose not to. Unsurprisingly it became immediately apparent that the geography of the Island would determine the elements. Whilst some institutions figured to a greater extent in his considerations when choosing where to take his 'A' levels, based upon the distance and ease of travel from his home, others had been included for consideration or equally dismissed for other reasons. These became clearer as the interview progressed.

The agreed elements became the five High Schools, all of which have sixth forms, the college of further education, and the Island's private ie fee paying school. Mainland colleges and schools were excluded despite their theoretical proximity by ferry and public transport, as he had not considered them and had no views about them.

Each college and school was written onto pre-cut pieces of paper that were then mixed up and drawn arbitrarily and allotted a letter to denote them and to make the recording of the constructs easier. The schools and college which became the elements are:

A Carisbrooke High School

B Sandown High School

C Medina High School

D Ryde (private)

E The Isle of Wight College

F Cowes High School

G Ryde High School

These elements were displayed face up on the table and lightly shuffled around during the interview to prevent their position affecting the responses. RG1 was invited to select three cards at a time and to put two together which were like one another and different from the third. Thus the constructs were built up with the Emergent Pole representing the two institutions that were like each other and the Contrast or Opposite Pole describing the third institution.

As the interview continued, RG1 selected his own groups of three institutions and proceeded to identify further constructs. Initially the interview progressed slowly as he

was unsure of the process, but he soon became more relaxed and the constructs emerged quite easily. During the course of the interview we discussed why each construct was important. When it became difficult to elicit further constructs, he was asked to evaluate the seven institutions in terms of each construct on a scale of one to five, where one represented the same as the emergent pole and five represented the opposite or contrast pole.

Findings

Once the Repertory Grid was complete, we talked about the constructs that were most important, and those factors that were important in determining RG1's decision to attend the college to take his 'A' levels rather than stay at school. What became clear was that his views about the college were distinctly different from his views about any of the schools. A visual analysis of the grid showed the college's distinctive profile in RG1's perception.

The negative views of the college related to its academic reputation. Its academic standing was seen as poor or unknown as was its success, or rather lack of success. The positive points were its range of courses, and the way in which students are treated as adults. The other determining factor in RG1's choice was the ease of travel and the College's location.

Further analysis of the grid required the appropriate software (this was done at a later date). However, we can identify some potentially important points from just this one interview. The college benefits from:

- A wide range of provision, particularly 'A' levels
- Its location in Newport
- Its position adjacent to transport routes
- The way in which students are treated as adults

The college is harmed by:

- Poor academic results
- Poor academic image

Reflections

Given that this was the first Repertory Grid interview, it worked well and some potentially useful issues were raised and explored. Some lessons were also learned about how to conduct Repertory Grid interviews. Firstly the length of time required for an interview was going to be longer than was initially anticipated, one hour at least rather than the anticipated thirty minutes. The introduction and explanation of the technique needs to be clear yet relaxed, before the grid itself is developed. Clarity would be improved with a pre-printed grid and cards with the elements already printed. This would also make the materials appear more professional.

RG1 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	Far away	Close
2	I looked at them at depth before choosing one for me	Only looked at superficially
3	close to a golf club	far from a golf club
4	in Newport	not in Newport
5	free to me as a student	have to pay to go there
6	has a poor reputation	known as a good college/school
7	has the right combination of subjects	an unknown range of subjects
8	friends of the family work there	no friends of the family work there
9	have the right subjects	don't have the right subjects
10	know what its 'A' levels are	do not know what its 'A' levels are
11	treat you like a school child	treat you like an adult
12	knew students there	did not know any students there
13	appear in the 'A' level results league table	not in the league tables
14	well known for its successes	not known for its successes

Interview 2: RG2

RG2 was a second year GNVQ Advanced Business Student at the College. She had spent a year in the sixth form of her High School. The interview and grid completion followed the same format as the first interview with the addition of a pre-printed grid and element cards.

Analysis

A visual examination of the Repertory Grid again showed the College with a distinctive profile compared to the High Schools. Discussion and probing of the constructs revealed similar perceptions to RG1, but with a greater positive view of the College. The additional perceptions related to the College staff, whom RG2 described as much more helpful and committed than those at (her) High School. However, the physical appearance of the College was described as being poor and 'off-putting'. She chose the College after a year in a sixth form, because the College staff would treat her like an adult, and she was glad she had come to College, and wished that she had come earlier. An initial analysis of the grid and the comments made indicate that the College benefits from:

- its relaxed atmosphere
- adult approach to students
- good facilities
- more independence for students
- good courses

It is harmed by:

- a poor reputation, particularly with parents
- poor physical appearance
- average to poor academic standards

Reflections

This was another interesting and useful interview. I am still learning to use the technique but feel more comfortable with it. How much should I lead the interview and interpret the constructs? Should the elements be initially grouped into threes or be left unsorted? Should the elements be refined, added to, or reduced? Generally the process seems to be progressing well, and some useful findings are being highlighted.

RG2 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	more relaxed	disciplined
2	most like a high school	like a college
3	in Newport	not in Newport
4	a lower standard of education	a higher standard of education
5	better facilities	poor facilities
6	no sixth form uniform	a sixth form uniform
7	more independence for students	just like main school
8	good physical appearance	falling apart
9	poor reputation	good reputation

Interview 3: RG3

This was an interview with a female year 11 pupil at Carisbrooke High School. She proved to be initially reticent in her responses, and only elicited seven constructs, the smallest number of any of the interviews, which probably reflected her lower direct knowledge of the College. Nevertheless her responses, particularly when it came to rating the elements against the constructs, proved illuminating.

Most of her friends, who like her were expected to achieve above average GCSE results, were intending to stay at school to enter the sixth form and take 'A' levels before going on to University. This was because the 'best people stay on at school, only the naughtier ones go to College, courses are easier at College. No one would go to College to take 'A' levels. They would only go there to take GNVQs'. The determining factor in choosing between College or school is the future career objective, which in her case and that of her friends means University, which requires 'A' levels, hence the choice of the school sixth form.

Laddering up to the constructs was attempted, by asking which construct was most important and why. These two questions were asked again in order to ascertain the interviewee's core constructs. What emerged was the central importance of reputation, followed by where her friends were going and finally 'how you are treated in the sixth form (or College)'.

Cowes High School was perceived to have a good reputation for IT (information technology). Medina High School was ranked the lowest in terms of reputation with the College and Ryde Private School (which is for 'thick, rich kids') second lowest. The College's reputation is that 'it comes in the bottom few in the country, and one friend claims it came last in a survey.' This view is obviously a result of the last FEFC inspection and the resulting local press articles following the publication of the Inspection report.

The only aspect where the College scored highly was the 'absence of a uniform and fewer rules'. However, this was not seen as a determined factor. Interestingly the school is considering abolishing the, already relaxed, uniform rules for sixth formers. This interview took place in October by which date she had received 'career information' about the sixth form at her school, but no information whatsoever about the College.

RG3 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	similar courses	different courses
2	similar ages of the students	no age limit, a mixture of ages
3	good reputation	poor reputation
4	state school	fee-paying
5	good location and site	poor position, lack of space
6	better for 'A' levels	poor for 'A' levels
7	uniform	no uniform

Interview 4: RG4

This subject was a lecturer at the College, and a parent. It is interesting to note that during the interviews with people who combine these two roles, and in attempting to determine how they perceive the College and the local High School, they construct their view of the College in terms of the choices they make for their own children. It then becomes illuminating to hear the reasons for such choices.

The interview took over an hour and elicited some interesting constructs and rankings. Laddering was used to a significant extent, and this helped to clarify the constructs and to find the core beliefs. Both laddering techniques were used, following the determination of the constructs and the ranking of the institutions against each construct continuum. Laddering up was carried out by asking the respondent for each construct, whether or not it was important, and if it was important, to explain why. The importance of each construct was pursued in order to obtain his core constructs i.e. those constructs that he would find difficult to change. He was then asked to prioritize and re-arrange the constructs. During this process some constructs were dispensed with as being unimportant whilst others were amended, and a priority was established.

Laddering down was carried out by asking the respondent to clarify the differences and distinctions between the emergent pole and contrast pole. This proved to be straightforward in this instance.

Analysis

The importance of examination results and inspection reports were highlighted as the most important core constructs. High student numbers and increasing student numbers were perceived as being indicators of a 'quality' organization. Such a school/college would also have good examination and inspection results. Next in importance came the resources, specifically the premises and the IT provision. High quality premises and up to date and plentiful IT facilities were seen to be major attractors for prospective students and particularly for the parents of the 16-19 age group. A particularly interesting construct related to whether or not he would consider sending his own children to each institution, with the ranking revealing a below average result for the college. He expects his own children to attend their present school's sixth form.

RG4 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	performs well in inspection	poor performance in inspection
2	good post-sixteen results	poor post-sixteen results
3	large number of students	small number of students
4	good IT provision	poor IT provision
5	high quality premises	poor quality premises
6	is a place I would send my own children to	I would not consider sending my own children there
7	are places I have knowledge of	have little personal knowledge
8	have increasing student numbers	has falling rolls

Interview 5: RG5

RG5 was a lecturer in business studies and was actually the first member of the teaching staff to be interviewed. She was a particularly interesting interviewee with a perspective as a parent as well as being a College lecturer.

Analysis

The observations made during the Repertory Grid interview were as interesting and revealing as the grid itself. Medina High School was perceived as being particularly 'poor'; ironically perhaps this was because the school (unlike the others) 'played fair' in the collection and publication of their results. 'Rough' students as exemplified by bad language were identified as attending Medina High School and the College. She considered the most important factors in determining the choice of school/college for her own children to be the institution's academic achievement, having 'nice' students and investing in physical resources. She believed that these factors were important because the environment in its widest sense determined what the student would achieve. For the third time, out of three interviews, the College was perceived as having a poor academic record and low achievements. This became a recurrent theme in the interviews. She also assessed the College as being above average for the number of troublesome students, and lacking investment in resources. In summary, the College benefited from:

- a wide curriculum
- good technology
- meeting the needs of a wide range of students

However, it was harmed by having:

- low academic achievement
- poor sporting renown
- lack of investment in resources
- poor inspection report

She concluded by offering some suggestions for improving the College's effectiveness in terms of meeting the aspirations of students and parents. She proposed that the College's curriculum be narrowed, particularly reducing the number of 'A' levels offered, in order to target the limited resources to the successful and growth areas of the curriculum. Students, particularly the 16-19 age group should be developed to create more of a collegiate ethos, both to compete with and complement the schools in terms of sports and arts. Co-operation with the schools to share and rationalize competing curriculum offerings should be encouraged.

In conclusion she chose Carisbrooke High School for her own children because 'it is a more controlled environment whereas the College may offer more chances for students to develop, but it lacked control, and students can't always benefit from the opportunities available with a lax system'.

Reflections

More interesting and useful perceptions, which appear to both share some of the views of the students whilst interpreting them differently.

As an experiment a wider scale, from one to seven, was used on the grid, and I was not sure that it aided the analysis, and it was not used again.

An additional source of data was gathered from subjects RG5 by asking her to categorize the College's Planning Process against a five-point scale grid the ends of each pole were developed by myself prior to the interview. The responses revealed a distinctively negative view of the planning process, which she described as 'closed, reductionist, extrapolative, positioning, elitist and demanding'. These descriptions were elicited by asking her to answer the question and to complete the grid shown below.

How do you see the college's planning process?

1 2 3 4 5

Inquisitive	Closed
Expansive	Reductionist
Prescient	Extrapolative
Inventing	Positioning
Inclusive	Elitist
Demanding	Easy

I started using this grid with college staff for two reasons. Firstly as a technique it had echoes of a repertory grid, and secondly because I thought that staff perceptions of the formal planning process was going to be an important factor in affecting the College's effectiveness. In the event I soon dropped the technique as it proved to lack the major

advantage of the repertory grid interview proper, as it was too restrictive and prescriptive. In addition it soon became clear that the formal planning process formed little more than a minor aspect of their working life.

RG5 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	state school	private school
2	is a school	is like a college
3	have a technology bias	has an arts bias
4	high academic achievement	poor academic achievement
5	a poor inspection report	good report
6	not renowned for sport	good reputation for sport
7	trouble making students	nice students
8	homogeneous students	heterogeneous students
9	wide curriculum	narrow curriculum
10	lack of investment in resources	high investment

Interview 6: RG6

RG6 was a lecturer in construction, who concentrated mostly on the College in developing his constructs. He made great efforts in his words 'to be honest and fair with the College, and not wanting to be negative'. This resulted in some very factual and a limited number of constructs. However, his views expressed during the construction of the grid were perhaps more illuminating.

Analysis

An attempt was made at laddering the constructs. This resulted in the inspection reports being identified as the most important, with the College scoring the lowest. His belief was that inspection reports are the most important factor when parents are advising their own children. He also believed that schools shouldn't all offer the same curriculum areas. His own children attended Carisbrooke High because of its language provision, moral ethos, academic reputation and inspection reports. He had visited three High Schools in making his choice, and was most influenced by, 'the feel of the school and the helpfulness of the staff'. He has one child who was about to enter the sixth form, and would not be coming to college because the child 'found the fabric of the building dreadful, and wouldn't be seen dead at the college'.

In categorizing the planning process he thought that it was 'demanding for the senior management team to write and prepare it for 'us' to follow'.

In summary, the College benefits from:

- technology bias
- open to everybody

However, it was harmed by:

- poor inspection report
- poor reputation
- poor state of the buildings

RG6 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	IT bias	poor IT reputation
2	good reputation for languages	basic language provision
3	sporting achievement	non-sporting
4	set fixed curriculum	wide curriculum
5	good OFSTED or inspection report	poor inspection report
6	open to everybody	elitist

Interviewee 7: RG7

This interviewee was a Head of Department at the College, who produced an average number of constructs (8). However during the interview these were effectively reduced to seven as the two most important ones were seen to be covering the same point, namely the extent to which the institutions provide a wide curriculum. The respondent was encouraged to 'ladder down' by identifying the most important constructs and explaining why they mattered so much. Those Institutions that specialized with a "narrow curriculum" were contrasted with ones with no specialism or a 'generalist curriculum'. It was felt that 'specialist' schools that concentrated their resources in narrow parts of the curriculum were important and 'attractive to parents with children who had different strengths, because they suited these different needs'. The College was seen to offer a general curriculum, and its strength was in providing a second chance to those who had not succeeded at school. The College 'is only good at the things others don't do'.

The respondent has two children aged 11 and 14 and 'doubted that the College 'A' level provision could cope with their needs'. It was 'very doubtful that they would attend the College'.

RG7 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	have students from a diverse socio-economic background	has students from a narrow social class
2	below average GCSE results	above average GCSE results
3	narrow age range	wide age range
4	over a thousand students	under a thousand students
5	try to specialize	no curriculum specialism
6	attract less able students	attract more able students
7	good OFSTED or inspection report	poor OFSTED or inspection report
8	strengths in certain areas	generalists

Interview 8: RG8

The Vice-Principal, has worked at the College for many years, he has been Vice-Principal under the last three Principals, and was acting Principal for six months in 1999 prior to the appointment of Principal Y in September 1999.

He generated the greatest number of constructs (14), and they were notable for their emphasis on management and strategic issues, which contrasted with the grids produced by students and lecturers. The correlation tree shows the College as being significantly different to the High Schools. Eleven of the constructs used the College as the contrast pole, contrasted to pairings of schools as the emergent pole. Laddering was carried out by asking him to identify which of the constructs were particularly important and why.

Six constructs were examined further in this way, and it became apparent that a small number of themes were important to him, as can be seen in the following laddering process:

- The distinction was made between teachers in schools as ‘generators of education and College lecturers as custodians of a trade or profession’. He thought that this gave schoolteachers a more coherent culture and a more whole school focus, whilst college lecturers owed a divided loyalty between their trade/profession and the College.
- Finance is more important to the College because of its restricted geographical catchment area. Meanwhile the government’s financing of the College leads to direction of the College’s activities.
- The College’s intake of both adults and younger students has a massive effect on its culture. The mix has implications for funding, and contradictory implications for its strategy.
- The managers, whether internal promotions or appointed from outside have the biggest single impact on the College’s culture. Their motives are similar despite their disparate backgrounds. There is a ‘genetic link’ between different managers based on their ‘opportunism and entrepreneurialism’, which he defined as a ‘non-businesslike attitude’, with College managers often having had careers outside education and then choosing to move into further education when an opportunity appeared, rather than as a planned career. This he compared with schools where the managers had chosen teaching as a first and only career, and were appointed from long-serving teachers.

- The governors have a greater impact on the College's culture than is the case with other colleges, due to the peculiar nature of the Island's culture. This closer-knit community has many agendas which are brought into the College by the governors.

RG8 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	in marketing terms unassailable	has no pre-determined catchment area
2	are reliant on state support for income	is reliant on varied sources of income
3	ex-grammar schools	conceived as a comprehensive
4	have the vast majority of clients as children	has the vast majority of students as adults
5	managers are promoted from long serving teachers	has managers with non-educational managerial experience
6	the staff culture is 'the primacy of education for itself'	has a culture which is more supportive of a trade or profession
7	few sources of income	many sources of income
8	staff choose education as first career	opportunistic choice by staff
9	small budget	large budget
10	market themselves as high quality	niche market as only provider
11	staff and students are not self-reliant	staff and students are self-reliant
12	people become governors for social reasons, their contribution has to be seen to be altruistic	people become governors for business and distinction reasons

13	students have to attend or the police intervene	no compulsory attendance
14	rigid single annual cycle	several annual cycles

Interview 9: RG9

RG9 was a part-time lecturer at the College. This was an early session using the Enquire Within software on a laptop - consequently an amount of time was spent (very productively) on the use of the software. The ability to use the interactive software was very beneficial and led to a deeper understanding of the constructs in particular. The ability to display, amend and re-visit both constructs and elements was excellent.

- Further practice is needed with the software - nevertheless sufficient competence was displayed (!) to be able to continue to use the software immediately.
- There are still aspects of the software that need exploring - perhaps greater depth of perception can be revealed.
- A drawback is that the laddering techniques can become mechanistic and repetitive - the lesson is to be flexible in their use. The previous paper based interview techniques were in some ways more flexible and achieved as much as the software.
- It would be beneficial for the interviewees to operate the laptop themselves - as happened half way through this interview. This may well maintain and enrich the interviewees' responses.

Analysis

RG9 was an interesting interviewee because not only did she provide the part-time lecturer perspective, but she had also worked in a number of colleges. Consequently she used colleges as the elements rather than the Island schools. She developed a relatively small number of constructs, seven. They were also quite prosaic, as they included the size of the colleges the range of courses, but they became more evaluative in comparing the College and the other institutions in terms of their results. These formed three similar constructs and the college fared badly against all three.

RG9 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	large	small
2	in competition with other colleges	no competition from other Colleges
3	poor GCSE results	good GCSE results
4	good 'A' level results	poor 'A' level results
5	poor GNVQ results	good GNVQ results
6	have pupils up to age 18 only	has adult students
7	good choice of courses	narrow range of courses

Interview 10: RG10

The interviewee was a relatively new member of the support staff, only appointed three months prior to the interview. He was highly IT literate and operated the Enquire

Within software on the laptop himself. Prior to his appointment he had not even visited the College, despite being an islander.

His perceptions of the College were illuminating despite the relatively small number of constructs (seven), some of which were unrevealingly factually construed e.g. opening times and the absence of a school uniform.

He thought that 'even people who have attended the College have a bad view of it, even though they were grateful for their courses'. This was a common theme that I encountered whereby people distinguished between the College that they rated poorly, and their College course that they rated highly. Interestingly' this was also echoed by staff being complimentary about 'their manager' whilst being very critical about College management in general. The College has a 'poor image on the Island often caused by its poor results'. However, the College provided good employment opportunities for its students, because it provided people with 'the opportunity to change and improve themselves'.

He found that 'in general staff are enthusiastic, but that a few denigrate and criticise the College.' The external appearance of the College was 'poor', but the IT facilities were up to date and 'closer to a University than a High School', with a more relaxed learning environment. He thought that the College was 'over-managed with too many statistics and reports'.

RG10 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	require their students to wear a school uniform	they have a more relaxed attitude to student appearance
2	have established a good reputation	it has struggled to gain a good reputation
3	have up to date IT resources	has outdated IT facilities
4	have new sports facilities	has older sports facilities
5	receive little media attention	attracts media attention
6	have a limited number of courses	has a wide range of courses
7	are only open during school hours	is open in the evenings and weekends

Interview 11: RG11

This was an interview with myself, using the Enquire Within software. I know that this may sound like a contradiction in terms, but the interactive nature of the software makes it possible. I developed my own elements from the Colleges I have worked in. I attempted both laddering techniques, but soon abandoned both of them, as I felt comfortable with the constructs I developed and the process, having conducted a number of Repertory Grids with others. On reviewing the constructs and the rankings I was quite surprised at what was developed. They are not the ones I would have expected.

A number of initial observations can be made including:

- some of the constructs don't reflect the usual good/bad range, instead they only range over varying degrees of worse. For example, College Principals only range

between competent and dreadful. Similarly management is only seen to range between average and very poor. This doesn't indicate a very high opinion of either and presumably reflects my personal experiences

- two of the constructs relate to the competitive nature of the colleges' markets and how they react to this
- other constructs refer to the culture in the respective colleges. These included constructs such as: 'full of fear and ill-will/a friendly place and professional/amateurish', which also relates to the management.
- I also had a construct concerning the political environment, which is not one construed by the other interviewees.

Ten constructs were developed, which is above the average. I found the process quite difficult and tiring.

RG11 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	are fairly small	very large
2	have poor academic reputation	has a good academic reputation
3	a wide range of small courses	wide range of large courses
4	in a very competitive market	has little competition
5	dreadful principals	competent principal
6	strong Labour authority	strong Liberal authority
7	try hard to attract students	doesn't have to try hard
8	full of fear and ill-will	a friendly place

9	professional	amateurish
10	average management	very poor management

Interview 12: RG12

The interviewee was a Management Consultant working in the further education sector.

This was a particularly important and interesting interview for a number of reasons.

He was a former senior manager colleague of mine at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology (RCAT), and like me was made redundant along with all the other Assistant Principals at RCAT. Our careers then diverged; with RG12 becoming a consultant with an educational consultancy who carries out a range of consultancy activities combined with training in the colleges and FE associated agencies.

His perspective and different constructs of FE were especially interesting as they were made by someone with knowledge of the College, but from a detached viewpoint. He and his fellow consultant were employed by the College to carry out a range of activities.

He chose his own elements which included the IOW College, four other colleges with which he had recent or ongoing consultancy work and 'my ideal college'. He chose not to include RCAT, and when I challenged him about this at the conclusion of the interview he said that this was because his knowledge of RCAT was becoming out of

date. Analyzing his constructs it is apparent that the Isle of Wight College was far away from RG12's vision of the ideal college. When the constructs are considered as good/bad constructs the college is rated consistently closest to the 'bad' pole, and as we discussed the importance of the constructs through laddering he identified a number of factors that contribute to the college's ineffectiveness. He saw The Isle of Wight College as 'being into survival not improvement, is seen by many employees as a failing institution, has an air of depression, staff morale is low and a poor physical environment'. The college only correlated at 68% to his ideal college. It is also noteworthy that RG12 did not mention inspection reports, reputation or exam results.

RG12 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	They make the best of a poor physical environment	Has a supportive physical environment
2	Are into improvement	Is into survival
3	Staff morale is low	Staff morale is high
4	In a pleasant area	In an unattractive area
5	Regard ethnic minority students as a source of money	Is a multi-racial college
6	Everyone is genuinely interested in the students	Many staff have their own agenda
7	Have an air of excitement at learning	Air of depression
8	Are largely working class	Is largely middle class
9	Many employees see them as failing institutions	Most employees see it as a successful institution

10	Want to serve a wide range of students	Serve a narrow focus
11	Tolerate minute classes	Is bursting at the seams

What follows next is what I believe is the pivotal repertory grid interview, with Principal Y. This is book ended by my reflections on my first meeting with him, and my reflections on the repertory grid interview itself. Both reflections come from entries in my learning diary made immediately after each interview.

My first meeting with Principal Y

This was initially an excellent positive meeting that took place on 11.1.2000, between 4 and 5 pm. He revealed that there is to be a major restructuring of management. He agreed that I could work with OPTIMA (a firm of consultants) who will carry out a staff survey and accompanying interviews, as part of a change process. I can work with them and evaluate the degree of change and its effectiveness. In addition I can work with another group of consultants, QUIET (Quality In Education and Training) Associates, as part of the same change process, to be a link and try to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of their change interventions.

I outlined my research proposals, methodology and the first cycle. I proposed that:

- I interview the Principal and to that end outlined the Repertory Grid interview technique. He agreed that I could set a time/date with his secretary.

- I visit Leyland Trucks/Optima for an initial one day training session on the teambuilding techniques
- I continue to liaise with QUIET Associates (consultants) to review progress and reconstitute some of their activities – notably to replace the team development activities already planned for the senior management team (SMT) by individual process consultation interviews. When the first teambuilding activity for the SMT was proposed, a ‘clear the air away day’, the reaction was very mixed and polarised and was abandoned to be replaced by the individual interviews.

This provided further evidence of the unwillingness of the Principal to acknowledge the issues of management and leadership that were affecting the college’s effectiveness. It was also indicative of the leader’s theory-in use being different from the espoused theory.

Reflections prior to the repertory grid interview with Principal Y

1 May 2000. Tomorrow I have an appointment with the Principal to carry out what may prove to be a pivotal Repertory Grid interview. Certainly it will be the final interview of the first cycle of research.

I have to admit to being somewhat apprehensive about it, because I feel that he will prove to be a difficult interviewee. I have already outlined the purpose of my research to him and the nature of a Repertory Grid interview, but I suspect that he doesn’t fully appreciate the true nature of such an interview and the depths that may be revealed.

I hope to discover his perceptions about the college and the blueprint that he has for the college. This should determine the proposed objective of the change process that he intends to achieve, and that I hope to facilitate along with OPTIMA.

Perhaps the trickiest initial stage of the interview is likely to be determining the six elements for inclusion into the Enquire Within program. I have considered not using the program, and reverting back to cards and manual recordings, but feel that it is important to utilise the flexibility of the Enquire Within program, provided I can overcome my own lack of confidence in using the laptop computer, and Y's indicated antipathy to using computers.

The six elements will have to be initially agreed with Y, but I need to have some suggestions, these are set out below:

- 1 The Isle of Wight College
- 2 Orpington College
- 3 College)
- 4 College) Other colleges he has worked in
- 5 College)
- 6 My ideal college
- 7 Where I want the Isle of Wight College to be in a year

Interview 13: RG13

This interview with Principal Y took place on 2 May 2000.

This was a curious and difficult interview, which was pivotal to the first cycle of research and provides both a full stop and helps to point the way forward for the second cycle. It was difficult due to the nature of the Principal as an interviewee.

The interview lasted for the full two hours allocated for it. Initially the interview was slow to get going. I was nervous and hesitant and I had a little difficulty with the laptop and the Enquire Within software. During this early stage the conversation was general, but I took the opportunity to outline the purpose of the interview in particular and the research in general. He rather distractedly listened and made a few supportive comments without providing any full commitment to the interview. He also took the opportunity to do a little desultory sorting of his morning mail.

Once the interview proper commenced, the mood changed as I became more relaxed and confident and whilst the Principal was initially cautious he also soon became more relaxed and increasingly reflective and revealing in his responses. His choice of elements was extremely interesting and even more so was his rating of the college against the elements.

His six elements were:

Hendon College

Filton College

Orpington College

Wellingborough College

Hertfordshire Regional College

The Isle of Wight College

In particular he gave the extremely strong impression that he neither rated the college very highly nor even enjoyed working there. My strong impression was that he was close to regretting coming to work on the Island.

As the Repertory Grid was completed we both agreed that there was no need to carry out any laddering exercises, as the importance of the elements was self-evident. We reviewed the grid and the ratings and I outlined the analysis of the resulting tree. Two colleges, Filton and Orpington, were very closely correlated with consistently positive ratings of 1s and 2s. These two were then correlated with Hendon. The two 'worst' colleges were also correlated together, namely Wellingborough and Hertfordshire Regional College, with primarily 4s and 5s' which were mostly associated with the negative poles. The Isle of Wight College came somewhere between these two groupings, but the 'Enquire Within' software correlated the college closer to the two 'worst' colleges and then to Hendon. There was the weakest correlation between the college and the two 'best' colleges. The college scored worst against three of the constructs, with 'less supportive staff', 'poor quality' and 'neglected premises'.

However, the final session of the interview became even more interesting as we both became more comfortable with the process. We found that we had some mutual ex-colleagues in colleges in Nottinghamshire and the mood of the interview became even more relaxed. During this time his language became increasingly interspersed with expletives and he appeared to reveal some strongly held views. My role became one of gently prompting him with questions to keep the flow of opinions going. His language, especially the expletives as adjectives to underline the strength of his views suggested his willingness to confide some deeply held beliefs to me, and also indicated his almost arrogance about his certainty in his views and opinions. The general impression he gave was of a fairly old-fashioned principal and manager, rather dismissive of other people's views and opinions and very self-confident in his own. He also underlined my impression that he neither liked the college nor being its Principal.

RG13 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	supportive staff	less supportive staff
2	high quality institution	poor quality
3	gave a good deal to students	poor deal to students
4	attracted high quality staff	attracted poor quality staff
5	emphasis on the premises	neglected premises
6	employed a large number of professional teachers	have a large number of staff who don't see themselves as professional
7	the college knew its role	it is still defining its role

8	place(s) I was proud to work in	there are parts of the college I am appalled at
9	run by madmen	run by an intelligent principal
10	wrong core values	right core values
11	high quality students went elsewhere	attracted high quality students

Conclusion

The major problem for me now is what to do with this interview and the information gained from it. The difficulty stems partly from my commitment made to him at the outset of the interview that it would be confidential and he would simply be referred to as a 'senior manager'. However, the importance of his responses and the fascinating revelations and opinions that he revealed only really matter because they were made by the Principal rather than just another senior manager. The second difficulty relates to my reactions to the interview and my reflections on his responses. On a positive note they provide a rich source of material that should inform the second cycle of research, but as I became increasingly unimpressed by his views and dislike the aspects of his personality that he revealed I am now unsure how to proceed.

Another positive aspect of the interview was the excellent way in which the Repertory Grid technique and the surrounding interview continues to prove to provide some excellent revealing material.

The pivotal question is what to do next? My next meeting with my DBA supervisors will, I hope, help to resolve some of these issues and point the way forward to the second cycle of research.

Interview 14: RG14

RG14 was the Director of Human Resources, and the interview took place on 23.2.2000. This was one of the Repertory Grid Interviews where the job role of the respondent needs to be given, because her position is pertinent to the interview and makes the analysis much more meaningful. She was also at the time of the interview my line manager. As a newcomer to the Island we agreed that she should take as the elements, the College and other colleges and organisations that she had worked for.

In a strictly utilitarian sense the interview was not a success, as she did not complete a grid. However, the reasons for the non-completion and other aspects of the interview were very informative.

The interview started late as RG14 was dealing with a previous appointment, which overran and this set the pattern for the rest of the interview. RG14 was ill at ease from the start, much more so than any of the other interviewees. Visitors, whom she did nothing to dissuade, continually interrupted the interview. She declined to put a 'no admittance' sign on the door, or to deal with the visitors quickly. Instead she allowed herself to be increasingly distracted until it reached the point that we could no longer continue, and the interview ceased soon after she had drawn up the six initial constructs,

which are shown below. Despite mutual expressions of regret at the early closure of the interview, I think we were both relieved that it was over, and despite both of us expressing the wish to complete the interview later, neither of us strongly proposed that we re-commence and complete the interview.

The elements that were completed were the fewest of any respondent, and were dull and functional. This revealed little about her view of the world, except that this unwillingness to fully engage in the process was in itself revealing. The first four constructs had a good/bad dichotomy with the ‘good’ pole on the left, and her responses showed that the College would be placed on or near the right hand pole of the constructs. This suggests both a limited and negative view of the College, or perhaps it just reflected her unwillingness to fully participate in my research, perhaps because she feared to reveal too much, or a little of both.

RG14 Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	On Mainland	Island
2	Multi-national Organisation	Single location
3	Customer-driven	Staff-driven
4	Very competitive market	Single college
5	1000 plus employees	less than 200 employees
6	Manufacturer	Service industry

Conclusion

The repertory grid data allowed me to interpret the words and numbers used by the participants. I labelled, categorised and re-analysed the data using a hermeneutic process that involved the interpretation of the meaning of the words and numbers by reference to their context (Ricoeur, 1977). This approach which links hermeneutics with the repertory grid techniques was proposed by Taylor (1990), because the five criteria for text set down by Ricoeur (1981) can be re-written for data sets as follows (Hussey and Hussey, 1977:71):

- Words and numbers convey meaning
- Numbers are chosen according to a structured rationale
- There is a relationship between this structured rationale and the intended meaning
- The work of this intended meaning is a projection of a world
- The uncovering of this meaning is through the mediation of self-understanding

The overall validity of Taylor's (1990) approach is supported by Marsden and Littler (2000) who propose that the researcher 'oscillates' between and makes visible the re-analysed general data and the rich detail available from the individual repertory grids and interview notes. In this way I extracted generic construct themes and found similarities in the frequency with which these construct themes were mentioned by the participants (Marsden and Littler, 2000).

In terms of element correlation, all the participants saw the college as being apart from the schools. These, however, were often closely correlated. The school seen as being most like the college was Medina High School. Unfortunately further analysis of the constructs for this school and the college show that the similarities are all negative, relating to poor reputation.

The one striking continual theme was the college's poor reputation, which was reinforced when the participants were asked which constructs could be considered as being good/bad constructs. The poor reputation also appeared alongside poor results and poor inspection reports. These three themes are construed by all the student and staff respondents, with the college always scoring a figure representing maximum strength on the negative pole of the construct. The poor physical appearance of the buildings was also a construct for some of the participants. However, one of the most significant aspects of the interviews was that none of the three members of the executive used constructs relating to reputation, inspection results or results. Instead they produced in the case of the Director of HR, simplistic factual constructs, and in the case of the VP and the Principal many constructs relating to the management and finances. One of Principal Y's constructs was especially intriguing, it was 'run by madmen/run by an intelligent principal', with the college rated as 3 on the scale of 1 – 5!

It is also significant to note that not one of the members of staff who have children aged 16 or approaching 16, either 'allowed' their children to attend the college or would allow them to attend.

The positive aspects of the college are the adult atmosphere, wide curriculum and IT facilities. The participants' constructs always include at least one or more very personal constructs, which are impossible to generalise from, but were very important to the individual. For example, the lecturers always included constructs related to their own subjects, whilst the first student included the proximity to a golf course.

The paradox for improving the college's effectiveness lies in the central importance of the college's poor reputation resulting from the poor inspection reports, yet the indicators and factors measured by the inspectors are not seen as important constructs. Therefore, resources, which it could be argued should be put into improving inspection grades, may militate against the other needs of the stakeholders. Meanwhile the three most important members of the executive did not have a single construct between them relating to reputation, inspection reports or examination results. These contradictory and diverse constructs support Weick's (1976) claim that educational organisations are examples of loosely coupled systems, where a defining characteristic is the presence of contradictory preferences in the organisation. This lack of agreement among stakeholder preferences is seen by Cameron and Whetten (1983) as an obstacle in identifying the best criteria for an organisation's effectiveness. However, they also provide a solution for an organisation by proposing that organisations should not try to achieve maximum effectiveness for any one stakeholder group's criteria, but should endeavour to achieve a 'satisfactory' effectiveness for the multiple constituencies. In the college's case that would require the allocation of resources to achieve a sufficient level of examination results and the other indicators so beloved of the inspections so as to

achieve an inspection report which is satisfactory. Meanwhile other resources should be allocated to the other factors seen as important by stakeholders.

Chapter 9

The Senior Curriculum Managers

Introduction

This analysis examines a 'team' of senior managers in the College, namely the six Heads of Department (HoDs). It is important because it uncovers some of the reasons why this key stakeholder group inhibits the process of achieving effectiveness. It uses some research carried out by one of the HoDs, to whom I am indebted for the original data, plus my own observations of the HoDs, and a number of interviews with that HoD who I shall refer to as F in order to preserve the requested anonymity and to be consistent with the original research carried out by F, who refers to the other HoDs by designated letters A-E.

F interviewed four of the other HoDs using the Repertory Grid technique. The elements were the five HoDs, excluding F, the interviewer. At a later date I interviewed F using the same technique, but utilising the Enquire Within software, and including F as an element along with the other five HoDs. I also interviewed F about the data and accompanying findings. Her research concerned the effectiveness or otherwise of the management team, which seemed particularly relevant to my own research. Consequently the following analysis, whilst drawing on F's data, is a result of my own observations and reflections, for which I accept full responsibility. This method of investigation seeks to understand the inter-relationships of managers (HoDs) and their

perceptions of each other. The findings cannot be validated. There is no way for the reader to know whether it is an accurate account, or whether the findings are meaningful.

The objective of F's original research was to explore the relationships between the individuals in the senior management team and to analyse the underlying reasons for their apparent dysfunctional behaviour. This behaviour may have been one of the implicit reasons behind the latest restructuring. It was useful for this research because managerial competence had been raised as a cause of the college's ineffectiveness in the FEDA Staff Satisfaction Survey, (please refer to the following two chapters). Research suggests that leadership in schools and colleges was a major factors in determining their effectiveness (see the next chapter).

The interviews revealed a culture of mistrust, with individuals in competition with one another, and not acting as an effective team. This is perhaps unsurprising in a departmental structure led by the two permanent Principals who themselves engendered at the best mistrust and, in the case of Principal X, fear resulting from his alleged aggressive behaviour. The achievement of an ideal team, composed of perfect people who have subsumed their egos and individuality for the greater good of the team is unattainable. Robbins and Finlay (1998) observe that real teams are composed of living, breathing and very imperfect real people.

The HoDs certainly displayed imperfections. According to F they appeared to delight in scoring points off each other but tended to avoid direct conflict, instead resorting to back

biting and private one to one meetings with their line manager in order to secure support for their own objectives. This view is supported by the repertory grid interviews that follow. It also supports the findings from the staff survey that are extremely critical of the management. This brief review of the concepts and ideas relating to teamwork and leadership helps to explain the importance of the interviews, and encouraged the further analysis of the issues in the chapter on leadership.

Success or failure of a team depends partly on the quality of their members, who need the correct levels of experience and expertise. They should share a common purpose with objectives that are known and agreed by all its members, who work together in order to achieve them (Belbin 1996). The HoDs, by operating in a time of great change and uncertainty would have had to be perfect people to work effectively as a team. This proved to be impossible, presumably because change causes fear, particularly for managers whose formal status may be changing (Kets de Vries, and Miller, 1984). This decline in status can lead to a real sense of loss.

One attempt to formulate a theory to determine the success of an effective team is provided by Belbin (1996), who suggests that teams can operate effectively if the right combination of roles is present. He identified nine team roles: plant, resource investigator, shaper, motivator, evaluator, team worker, implementer and completer finisher. Belbin predicts how combinations of these roles will affect the success or failure of the team. Clearly a balance of roles within a team is desirable, but it is difficult to identify and allocate precise roles to the HoDs as team members. Belbin's somewhat simplistic view of the ideal mechanistic team assumes a degree of

consistency in behaviour which is difficult to observe in this team. It takes insufficient account of the unpredictability of human behaviour, and the underlying values, politics and culture of the individuals and of the organisation. Torrington et al. (1985), in Pritchard and Stanton (1999) suggest that, “for effective functioning both task orientated and social/emotional orientated behaviours are necessary”. Teams need to be supportive of each member, to respect the views of others, allow for conflict and risk-taking without fear of ridicule. Even when the HoDs effectively carry out tasks, their social and emotional orientated behaviour is too often inappropriate, which is exemplified by their comments during the Repertory Grid interviews. Whether or not the recent re-organisation rectifies the dysfunctional team behaviour is a moot point, for as Kets De Vries, and Miller, (1984) recognise,

“organisational change agents will be effective only if they get at the roots of dysfunctions – but this might be very difficult if problems are so deeply ingrained and so broadly manifested. Piecemeal changes will not do much good, and revolutionary ones are expensive, hard to implement, and politically inexpedient.”

(Kets De Vries, and Miller, 1984: 43)

Piecemeal changes in management personnel and revolutionary changes in structure have both been attempted in recent College history, but neither has been successful in moving the organisation forward. On the contrary, these changes have merely reinforced fears and deepened the climate of distrust resulting in what Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) describe as the paranoid organisation,

“characteristic of a dysfunctional paranoid organisation is the tendency to centralise power in the hands of top executives and their consultants who design control and information systems. Those who feel threatened generally like to have a good deal of control over their subordinates.”

(Kets De Vries, and Miller, 1984:26)

This they claim leads to fundamental weaknesses with a,

“lack of concerted and consistent strategy – few distinctive competencies. Insecurity and disenchantment among second-tier managers and their subordinates because of the atmosphere of distrust.”

(Kets De Vries, and Miller, 1984:27)

Mangham (1979) puts forward a useful model for analysing behaviour within organisations. He sees the individual as an actor who presents a ‘self’ to different audiences, taking into account the setting, props and cues thereby creating their own scripts. He goes further (Mangham, 1998) claiming that some managers hide their true emotions, which they see as irrational, and instead they ‘create and maintain settings in which displays of emotions are completely suppressed’ (p64). This can lead to a tendency for management recruitment to favour ‘people with little or no capacity for empathetic perception’ and for ‘future leaders’ to be developed by ‘systematically extirpating any capacity that remains’ (Mangham 1998:64). This is seen as a worrying matter when it comes to finding ways forward for organizational and managerial

practice. Practical wisdom is likely, concludes Mangham, 'to be deeply informed by emotion'. The suppressed emotions displayed by this group of managers do not bode well for the managerial practice of the college.

Woodcock, (1989) believes that any change in an organisation must start at the top, because people are most likely to embrace change if they can see that those at the top are committed to it. Principal Y, who can be seen elsewhere expressing his strongly held belief that he is the prime instigator and determinant of culture change, echoes this view. However, Woodcock, (1989) also emphasises the view that effective teamwork at the top has the greatest effect and is essential to organisational success. Perhaps this is why the Principal has introduced a new small Executive team to achieve his objectives, which excludes the vast majority of the previous senior management team.

The previous senior managers displayed many of the symptoms of a bad team, with unhealthy competition, back biting and political infighting, reflecting Woodcock's description of a bad team in its "undeveloped stage".

THE INVESTIGATION

The aim of F's initial investigation was to understand the behaviour of the College Curriculum team, consisting of the six Heads of Departments (HoDs) led by the Director of Curriculum, who was not included in this study. It fitted in with my research as it explores the way leadership and management may affect the college's effectiveness, and helps to validate the data produced by my own interviews and the staff satisfaction survey. F believes that the interviews were helped by the non-threatening role that F presented to the other HoDs, because she was only in a temporary role as an acting HoD. F further believes that this helped in the acquisition of far more in depth information than would otherwise have been the case. I think it is significant that members of a senior management team could find such research "threatening"; it is a very strong indicator of their own insecurity, lack of trust and dysfunctional team behaviour. The interviews started with the proposition, "that to understand the organisation we must understand the individuals who work within it."

The initial investigation carried out by F used Kelly's Theory of Constructs to create semi-structured interviews, with F attempting to prevent her own perceptions and impressions from prejudicing the research. She had previously been interviewed by myself using this technique, as part of my exploration of different stakeholders' perceptions of the College in relation to the local High Schools (see above), and we had explored the usefulness of the technique for her own research. Hence F's decision to use Repertory Grid interviews with four of the HoDs and my own use of such an interview

with her to advance my research into this team. Whilst acknowledging Mangham's view that,

“each of us approaches events and circumstances with bundles of values and related assumptions which constitute our basic frames of reference or conceptual models in terms of which we analyse and comment upon that with which we find ourselves confronted,”

(Mangham, I, 1989:75)

I can confirm that F's analysis reflects my own observations of the team, reinforced by my interviews with F herself and other research data included in this project. The validity of this approach is supported by Mangham (1993) who claims that as the individuals in organisations are the experts about their culture, all managers undertaking action research must start by defining and negotiating the reality that occurs between stakeholders.

The initial four, one-hour interviews took place in a venue chosen by the manager, as did the fifth interview with F. It was requested that this venue allowed for privacy and that the interview would take place without interruption. Two managers chose their own office (as did F) and the remaining two opted to go to F's office. All the managers requested total confidentiality, and that is respected here. This was paramount to preserve F's future relationships with the team, and is one of the reasons for making this thesis confidential to the University, a decision that facilitated my access to F's initial interview data, and her agreement to effectively act as a co-researcher for this aspect of my research.

Interestingly one manager (HoD), identified as D, was evasive and repeatedly broke appointments with F. He was clearly uncomfortable with the process so F did not pursue the request any further. Conclusions about D are drawn from my own observations and F's observations of him and the data given by the other team members.

F was concerned that the HoDs would interpret the research as an opportunity to distort information, that this information could be used for other ends, or by people attempting to employ F as a resource against others within the group. It was agreed by F that any information contained within this investigation would not be revealed to any member of the College, including the Principal. This led to long discussions between F and myself over my proposed use of the data in this research, which was only resolved with the restructuring which led to the removal of two HoDs with redundancy, the confirmation of three HoDs in new management posts, and the agreement that my own research maintains the confidentiality. These two factors largely removed the reason for confidentiality whilst also preserving it, thus allowing me access to the four interviews.

THE INITIAL FOUR INTERVIEWS

Using Kelly's Repertory Grid each interviewee was given four elements, the other managers within the team, excluding F, as it was felt that her inclusion would compromise her role as interviewer, and also initially excluding the interviewee. Each HoD was asked to identify in what way two of the three elements are similar to each other and one is different, rather than a contrast. The procedure was repeated until the

interviewee decided that no more constructs could be found. The participant was asked to clarify the meaning of his/her constructs and then to rate them in order of importance.

The second part of the interview involved 'laddering up'. Each element was rated by the participant on each construct, on a scale of one to five. Some elements might share the same number if the interviewee wished. By including the interviewee/participant as an element, F was able to assess how the HoD perceived him/herself within their own constructs. During this part of the interview the interviewees were asked to elaborate on their own constructs or explain their use of language. My own interview with F followed the same procedure, using Kelly's (1955) proposal that the grid provides a structured conversation and a method of constructive listening. Kelly was less interested in the final analysis, for him it was the process that was important, "it is not the arrival that matters, more the journey".

The techniques of laddering and the selection of a five-point scale for the grading of the elements against the elements are discussed earlier in the chapter. As is always the case, I acknowledge that the following analysis is grounded in my own subjective view of the world during a time of organisational turbulence. My analysis may be similar to F's, but is no more objective, but it is what it is to me. As always the constructs are open to other interpretation, because we see the world in different ways (Kelly 1955).

THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

The team of HoDs consists of two women and four men, identified as A, B, C, D, E and F; a brief thumbnail sketch, provided by F, of each may help to set the scene.

- A:** Male in his late forties, with a science background. He has worked at the College for 25 years. Defines himself as 'not a risk taker'. Aware of his limitations and blames a lack of management training.
- B:** Male in his early fifties, an engineer. Academically well qualified in his field; technically competent, but weak on management and people skills. Has taken part in management training, but retains a traditional authoritarian approach. Considered a 'bully' and a 'dinosaur' by some staff. Facing re-inspection after the curriculum area was awarded a grade 4.
- C:** Male in his early forties. Mixed academic background, not a specialist in any field, and personally aware of his limited academic qualifications. Has entrepreneurial skills which were utilised to some extent in his HoD role. He is liked by some of his staff, but seen as a bully by others. Has a paternalistic style.
- D:** Male in his late thirties, with a sales and marketing background. Appears to set himself and others, impossibly high standards. He has a very strong external personality, self-opinionated and over-bearing. Visibly exhibits symptoms of

severe stress. Facing re-inspection after part of his department was awarded a grade 4.

E: Female in her early forties. No experience outside further education, with an accountancy background and a higher degree. Worked her way up from being a lecturer. She is technically competent in her own field, but sometimes with a dictatorial management style. Can personalise situations, not always a good judge of personal relationships.

F: Female in her early forties. Much of her career spent in school sector. Undertaking an MBA. Open management style, not always appreciated by her own department.

REPERTORY GRID INTERVIEWS

Interviewee A

A has worked the longest at the College, and was effectively demoted during the 1998 restructuring, but he remains loyal to the College and the Island. His constructs were the most limited in number (7) and in their scope. He seemed uncomfortable during the interview. He claimed that, 'I don't know the team very well,' and that, 'we have never done anything as a team'. A found it difficult to comment objectively on E because of the events of the previous year (1999), when E was alleged to be both professionally and personally linked to the then Principal X, and was further alleged to have conspired with X and the FEFC to discredit the College at the time of an inspection in order to force a

merger with a mainland college. Her survival was allegedly assured by an agreement made between the governors and Principal X upon his departure.

A's constructs were fairly anodyne, but his comments, during the interview were more revealing. He also stated that, 'qualifications were not important'.

N.B. A was identified by the other HoDs in contradictory, yet strong terms as being a 'liar, creep, insular, dogmatic, departmentally scruffy, well-organised, showing leadership and trustworthy'! Such language is further evidence of a dysfunctional team.

RGA Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	administratively efficient	inefficient
2	do not operate corporately	operate corporately
3	highly strung	laid back
4	planners	not a planner
5	chatty	not very sociable
6	strategist	'is not'
7	reactive	proactive

Interviewee B

B developed 12 constructs. They reflected his own view of his ability, they centred on qualifications, ambition and experience, and in all of these he rated himself highly, compared to his colleagues. However, whilst his colleagues saw him as being well qualified, they also saw him as being 'inefficient, laid back and parochial'. This view is reflected by his staff who have a limited faith in his ability.

RGB Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	has masters degree	does not hold masters
2	very well organised	disorganised
3	has experience in quality	very little experience of quality
4	worked in other colleges	worked only on the IoW
5	have degree	has no degree
6	held cross college role	has not held cross college responsibility
7	will stay to complete task	will not stay to complete task
8	have larger diverse dept.	has less responsibility
9	ambitious will work elsewhere	would not work elsewhere
10	capable of greater responsibility	would struggle with more responsibility
11	do not have ear of Principalship	has ear of Principalship
12	strong personality	weak personality

Interviewee C

C developed 11 constructs. He values appearances highly, and was concerned about the dress code for managers. He sees himself as being intuitive, with natural leadership qualities and vision, but does not feel that he can empathise with the others. He believes he sets high standards and is very trustworthy. He claimed that 'we never do anything as a team', and that his 'perceptions of E are clouded by events'.

The others saw C in a mostly positive way. He was seen as being 'well-organised, capable, efficient and as a leader.' However, he was also conversely described as 'a bully, lies, cheats, relies on others and does not like to rock the boat, and lacking the necessary qualifications for the role'.

RGC Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	aggressive	not aggressive
2	not smart (dress)	smart
3	articulate	not articulate
4	predatory (dislikes interference)	not predatory
5	not capable	capable
6	able to empathise	not able to empathise
7	not a team player	team player
8	sets standards	does not set standards
9	leadership qualities	no leadership qualities

10	not to be trusted	trust
11	has vision	no vision

Interviewee D

Interviewee D is included here although he refused to be interviewed. His importance, like the dog in Conan Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles", lies in the fact, as Sherlock Homes' remarked, that 'he did not bark' This missing grid (RGD) would have appeared here. Reflections on D can be found below.

Interviewee E

E developed the highest number of constructs (18). As a female, she observed that the other elements, ie the other HoDs (except for F) were 'male and had similar' traits. Her constructs and comments were very personal and negative. They concentrated on personal characteristics. She clearly did not trust her colleagues, she stated that, 'I would like to use the construct 'trust' but could not in truth trust any of them'. She gave the impression of being a victim within a dominating, manipulative male culture. In the main the other members of the team displayed a negative attitude towards E. She was identified as being highly-strung, lacking in vision and leadership and parochial, but also having a strong personality.

RGE Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	extreme bullies	less of a bully
2	fun	not fun
3	perfectionist	not a perfectionist
4	very rude	less rude
5	talks too much	talks less
6	well qualified	has no academic qualifications
7	arrogant	not arrogant
8	lies	does not lie
9	creep	?
10	have to be right	does not have to be right
11	rely on others to run the department	does not have any help
12	can talk confidently about the curriculum	less confident about curriculum issues
13	extremely insular	outward looking
14	tend to be leaders	follower
15	prefer not to rock the boat	will not rock the boat
16	dogmatic in views	less so
17	very departmental	less so
18	would not socialise with	socialise with

Interviewee F

F developed 10 constructs. The elements differed from the other interviewees' elements, as they included managers outside the other five, and concentrated upon her general view of managerial attributes as well as her perceptions of the other HoDs. She feels that the other HoDs have created a 'male dominated work culture, lacking in trust and underpinned by competition, politics and self-preservation. She believes that they display a 'neurotic' management style, perhaps stemming from the continuing problems within the College and the dramatic changes, which have taken place. She believes that management have a reactive rather than proactive role, and that the team is largely departmentalised, lacking a corporate view and 'adopts a strategy of muddling through'.

RGF Constructs

	Similar Pole	Contrast Pole
1	have people skills	has poor people skills
2	they are both artistic	is not creative
3	teach across a range	can only teach at a higher level
4	like to get their own way	very giving
5	are able to emphasise	unable to understand people's feelings
6	are people centred	unable to relate to people
7	can self-destruct	is very calculating
8	think they are very intelligent	under rates him/herself
9	think they are good teachers	can be self-critical
10	can be a bit unstructured	is very structured

Interviewee D

D did not allow himself to be interviewed, but in many ways he is the most interesting member of the team. He appears as the most commonly occurring element in the creation of the other interviewees' constructs. He perceives himself as the most powerful member of the team. It is rare to witness any interactions between him and other members of the team outside of meetings. He is variously seen as a 'bully, dominant, aggressive, highly strung and ambitious.' He has a strong personality, and appears professional and confident. He does not trust his colleagues. In meetings he will sit in silence and often appears irritated and impatient. Once when challenged by a team member who was clearly uncomfortable with his body language and attitude, he said that he was angry because one of the team had betrayed a confidence.

During a consultancy training exercise organised by external consultants I had the opportunity to observe D being interviewed by another colleague G (not a HoD), with whom D obviously felt unusually relaxed and open. The objective of the exercise was for G to act as consultant to D and a real problem, which D wanted to solve. I was there as an observer and to provide feedback on the process. This encounter provided me with a fascinating insight into D's feelings, which I have not seen revealed elsewhere. It also provides a superb example of how dysfunctional the management team was, and perhaps still is.

The consultancy interview took place in February 2000, before the latest restructuring and round of redundancies.

D's initial problem centred on a lecturer in his department who was 'not co-operating in her teaching activities'. This 'unacceptable and irritating behaviour' created a problem for D, not because he didn't have a solution, but because the College's senior management would not support his preferred solution. He wanted to confront the lecturer and if necessary institute disciplinary measures, but he feared that this would lead to accusations of bullying and provoke counter claims. This problem he felt he could deal with, and must deal with and confront the lecturer, in order to 'display the courage on behalf of his other colleagues in the department'. D wants 'to be seen to uphold the discipline of the College'.

However, D soon revealed that the real problem was not the recalcitrant lecturer, but D's relationship with his fellow senior managers, and his executive line managers. He felt there is a 'lack of executive support' and worse, 'that there is a dangerous environment at the moment. A painful working environment.' He said he is 'afraid to admit a weakness' and doesn't want to be seen to be 'losing face'. He is afraid of 'committing career suicide'. He was unsure how long he 'could live with the tension. If you've looked the worst option in the face, can you do it?' He felt that one option is to do nothing, but he is unwilling to do this because of 'losing face with departmental colleagues,' He claimed that he will either confront the lecturer or take long-term sickness leave, as recommended by his doctor.

F relates another incident (which coincidentally I have referred to in my earlier learning diary extract entitled 'my first meeting with the Principal'), during a meeting of the

HoDs with the Director of Curriculum, where it was suggested that the HoDs might benefit from a team building exercise. After some initial discomfort three of the managers agreed that this might be a useful exercise. What followed amazed F; the two team members who strongly identified a lack of trust as a major issue repeatedly proclaimed their total satisfaction in the functioning of the team and their commitment and loyalty to their colleagues, and emphasising their complete trust in each other. The Director of Curriculum was anxious to avoid conflict and so deferred the decision to the Principal.

This consultancy interview perhaps confirms that D really doesn't trust his colleagues, have faith in the College executives, and that underneath his forceful exterior he is a deeply troubled man.

REFLECTIONS

This investigation into the six HoDs has deepened my view that the management team prior to re-organisation in May 2000 was dysfunctional and consequently ineffective, although this need not necessarily have been the case. In order to be effective they need to share common goals and cease to pursue departmental and personal interests. It may be that the re-organisation and the personnel changes will achieve this. The second cycle of research will examine this.

It is also interesting to note F's comments following her four Repertory Grid interviews, 'the investigation has given me a deeper understanding of the attitudes and behaviour of

the other team members. I was fortunate in that I have not had to suffer the destructive experiences of working closely with successive Principals. I now have a deeper understanding of the fears and paranoia caused by successive destructive and damaging regimes. Where before I felt only criticism and distaste for my fellow team members, I am now able to empathise and begin to understand the behaviour of the management team.'

The HoDs exhibit many of the characteristics identified by Kets de Vries and Miller (1984), "suspiciousness and mistrust of others, hypersensitivity, hyperalertness: readiness to counter perceived threats; over concern with hidden motives and special meanings." Analyses of the entire HoDs' grids shows that compared to the grids developed by the other interviewees they have produced on average a greater number of constructs. This could be because a group such as the HoDs hold deeper and more complex views about one another than those held by other stakeholders about the college. This indicates a group of managers who are concerned more with one another than the needs of the college as an organization. It is also striking how negative the constructs are and how their rating of colleagues against these constructs compounds this negativity. In addition the constructs themselves are very short and sharp.

POSTSCRIPT

It is now June 2000, the College has been restructured and there have been changes in personnel. The six HoDs were required to apply for just three management posts. A has become a Deputy Director for Curriculum (Lifelong Learning), D has become a Deputy

Director for Curriculum (16-19), C has become a Deputy Director for Business Development, F has reverted to the post of Programme Area Manager, whilst B and E have been made redundant.

And so the story continues, it is now November 2001, and A has taken early retirement on health grounds following long term absence through stress. C left precipitously to pursue a career in the private training sector, and F has been promoted to Deputy Director.

Second Cycle

Chapter 10

Exploring Staff Perspectives

Part One: The FEDA Survey, The Closed Questions

'Those who cast the votes decide nothing. Those who count the votes decide everything.' Joseph Stalin

The major source of research for the second cycle was a large-scale staff survey using questionnaires. This method was chosen as a contrast to the previous in-depth Repertory Grid interviews and the small-scale group interviews. I wanted to utilise a method that would allow every voice in the college to be heard. Fortuitously the survey was part of a national survey and so enabled me to draw some conclusions based upon national comparisons. The survey was developed and administered by FEDA (The Further Education Development Agency). FEDA is the primary organisation in further education for the provision of research and development in colleges.

The objective of the survey was to provide formalized feedback from staff as part of The FEFC'S stated aim to promote good management practice. Part of the justification for the use of such a survey comes from IiP (Investors in People), Probe and Excellence Models. The FEFC also supports the collection of staff satisfaction data as part of the annual self-assessment procedure undertaken by colleges. The use of this survey, which was not compulsory on colleges, was initially proposed by myself as it both fitted into my remit as Human Resource Development Manager, and as stated above, would so obviously provide valuable data for my research. My proposal met with the support of

The Vice Principal, as he could see how it would meet the requirements of The FEFC. The survey was carried out in June 2000 for the first time. Therefore there were no previous surveys either nationally or within the college that could be used for a longitudinal analysis. The staff satisfaction survey comprised 38 questions with tick box answers and two free text questions. I expected the free text questions to yield the most interesting qualitative data, and I was to be richly rewarded with the results. However, the more quantifiable data arising from the 38 questions also yielded some powerful information.

The results from each college were not made known to any other college, although the overall results of the survey were provided to each college taking part, which allowed me to benchmark the college's results with the sector average.

Eighty colleges and 9,515 members of staff took part in the survey. Both the colleges and the staff within them chose voluntarily to take part in the survey. This represents approximately 20% of all colleges in the sector. The college's questionnaires were dispatched to FEDA on 6 July 2000 and their initial data analysis arrived on the 20 October 2000. Whilst I have used some of FEDA's initial statistical analysis, the benchmarking comparisons, most of the quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis of the open questions are my own.

The questionnaire (Appendix 4) comprised 38 questions, or rather statements, which were shown together with two, four-point, rating scales. The left hand scale indicated how important the statement was to the respondent and the right hand side indicated the

respondent's level of agreement. This type of Likert scale has two main advantages. Firstly it allows a numerical value to be attributed to an opinion. Secondly, according to Hussey and Hussey (1997:171) 'a number of different statements can be provided in a list which does not take up much space, is simple for the respondent to complete and simple for the researcher to code and analyse'. The first statement is shown below as an example. Respondents were asked to mark a box on each side.

Figure 10.1

An example of a survey statement

Very unimportant		Very important			Strongly disagree		Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	I feel valued in this organisation	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The questionnaires contained a pre-printed message from the Principal see Appendix 4. This stressed that the survey was anonymous and that the results would be analysed by FEDA. It also stated that no individual would be identifiable in any level of analysis undertaken, and I have followed that undertaking in my own analysis.

The statements were divided into six sections:

Me

Staff

Management style

Communication

Customers

College

The complete list of statements is shown in Figure 10.2, where they have been numbered for ease of analysis and reference, although on the questionnaire no numbers were used.

Figure 10.2

Staff Survey Statement Index

Me

1. I feel valued in this organization
2. I understand my role and the contribution I am making to the goals of the college
3. My views are sought and considered
4. I feel I have security
5. There is an opportunity for me to progress within the organization
6. My manager gives me the support I need to do my job effectively
7. I have the authority to do a good job
8. I get sufficient training to do my job effectively
9. I get feedback from my manager on the work I do
10. I would recommend the college as a good place to work
11. I am not thinking of leaving the college

Staff

12. Staff work well together in teams
13. Staff views are sought and considered
14. Staff are involved in planning and improvements and setting targets
15. Academic and support staff have shared goals
16. Staff know what they are expected to do
17. Staff know how well they are performing

18. Staff receive appropriate training to make them effective in their job
19. Staff feel they have job security
20. Staff are committed to improving the quality of all aspects of the college

Management Style

21. Staff are not afraid to say what they really think
22. Staff are encouraged to take risks or try new things without fear of failure
23. Management see complaints as opportunities for improvement rather than threats
24. Management are effective in making decisions about the organization

Communication

25. Communication is effective in this college
26. Information about strategic and operational goals and performance are communicated effectively
27. Information about the college is readily available
28. Staff are given the information they need to do their job effectively

Customers

29. The college encourages feedback from all its customers
30. Complaints are dealt with effectively within the college

College

31. The college has a reputation for the quality of its provision
32. The college has a good future
33. Education is central to the management strategy of the college
34. Adequate resources are provided by the college for students
35. Staff workplaces are adequate
36. Adequate resources are provided by the college for staff
37. Equal opportunities are embedded into the culture of the college
38. The college genuinely cares about the welfare of its staff

Whilst the survey itself yielded important findings, the internal process of obtaining agreement to carry out the survey and the resulting feedback, dissemination of the analysis and the responses to the analysis are also extremely revealing. Just as the survey confirmed my earlier findings about the views of staff, so the feedback and the responses to the feedback confirmed my reservations about the management of the college. The feedback also involved my attempts at interventions. These interventions were part of the action research process, but as shall be seen, it proved to be very difficult to achieve positive results from them. However, they did produce yet more illuminating material.

Let me take the story back to April 2000. The college had just been re-inspected by the FEFC, a year after the dreadful full inspection in March 1999. This re-inspection in March 2000 resulted in three of the unsatisfactory grade fours improving to grade three, namely governance, management and the curriculum area of engineering. However, quality assurance and the curriculum area of science and mathematics were both again graded four. As a result of this there was a strong imperative, particularly from the Vice-Principal, to improve the quality assurance procedures before the next re-inspection in March 2001. The Vice-Principal was especially keen on improving this grade, as he was responsible for the quality assurance procedures.

Notification of the FEDA Benchmarking Staff Satisfaction Survey (hereinafter referred to as the FEDA survey) arrived at the college on 20 April 2000, and I saw it as having a number of advantages. Although the survey was initiated by FEDA it was clear from the accompanying documentation and from my knowledge of the requirements of the

FEFC that it would meet the needs of the FEFC, particularly for a college facing re-inspection. I hoped that it would provide a positive way forward in assessing and then improving the morale of colleagues. It would satisfy one of the FEFC's requirements in terms of self-assessment and it would hopefully provide me with some useful data for my own research. Although the Vice-Principal was easily persuaded of the survey's value, the Principal was reluctant to allow it to take place. This was partly due to the continuing discussions with OPTIMA (see Chapter 8) and their proposed survey and associated change management activity. He felt that the FEDA survey was an unnecessary extra survey, and that it would distract from the OPTIMA survey. However, since the OPTIMA survey was not now planned until later in the year at the earliest, and that there was a need to comply with the FEFC's wishes to carry out such a survey, he reluctantly agreed to the FEDA survey being carried out. The approval was given on 7 June 2000. The Principal's reluctance to give his approval and his reservations about the FEDA survey may have coloured his reactions to the survey's findings. Staff reacted more positively, as is evidenced by the number of completed questionnaires and the richness of the responses to the free text questions. However, there were two respondents who criticized the timing of the survey that they described as being insensitive.

What follows is a discussion of the findings of the FEDA survey, my interventions following my analysis of those findings – mostly through my attempts to disseminate these analyses, and the reactions to these analyses. I have set the material out chronologically with each stage of analysis being presented in the format used at the time, plus my reflections on the events surrounding my attempts to disseminate the

analyses. In addition there are other events, which took place during that time which affected the action research process, and the interpretation of the data, and these events are also included.

Four hundred questionnaires were distributed to staff via the programme area and support area administrators. They went to all full-time academic and support staff totaling 272 staff and 128 hourly paid staff. The college has approximately 502 names on the payroll at any one time, but around 100 of these are seasonal temporary staff, eg invigilators, English language summer school teachers and casual clerical staff no longer employed by the college, and it was decided not to survey these groups, and to concentrate upon full-time staff and those part-time or hourly paid staff who had continuing contracts.

Figure 10.3

Staff Numbers 1999/2000 as of February 2000

Full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) 272

Actual numbers:

Academic (full-time)	125
Support (full-time)	147
Hourly paid (Academic and Support)	<u>230</u>
Total	<u>502</u>

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 153 were completed and dispatched to FEDA on 6 July 2000. This represents a 38 % completion rate. The employment categories used by FEDA are slightly different to those used by the college specifically, the college does not use the titles of Head of Department and SMT (Senior Management Team), instead

it either uses the term 'managers' or includes them within the full-time academic total, as is the case above, where 14 are also classified as managers. The figures used for comparison in the following tables are the closest match to FEDA's categories. It is noticeable that five of the respondents still designate themselves as 'Head of Department', despite the abolition of that position.

Analysis of the Demographic Classification Data

The questionnaire (Appendix 4) contained demographic classification questions

covering: Age

 Gender

 Ethnicity

 Employment status

This classification data is analysed below. Wherever possible comparisons are made with the whole college population and the 'all colleges' responses. Analysis and comparisons of the responses to the questions made by the different demographic classifications of staff appear later in this chapter. The greatest number of responses (65) was from full-time support staff, closely followed by full-time academic staff (52). The full employment status of the respondents is shown in Figure 10.4, which also expresses these as a percentage of all the respondents and a percentage of all employees.

Figure 10.4

FEDA Survey – Employment Status of Respondents

Category	Number of Respondents	% of sample	% of college population	% of 'all colleges' responses
Full-time academic	52	35%	22%	36%
Full-time support	65	43%	29%	27%
Part-time academic	8	5%	35%	18%
Part-time support	19	13%	11%	11%
Head of Department	5	3%	-	
SMT	1	1%	3%	3%
Head of School	0	0	-	2%

Figure 10.5

FEDA Survey Gender Analysis

Gender	Number of respondents	%	College population %	'All colleges' %
Female	77	65%	58%	61%
Male	42	35%	42%	39%

The proportion of female respondents was higher than the proportion of male respondents, which slightly exceeds the national figures.

Figure 10.6

FEDA Survey Age Analysis

Age	Number of respondents	%	College population %	'All colleges' %
Under 30	17	11%	10%	10%
31-40	29	19%	21%	24%
41-50	62	41%	31%	39%
51 or over	43	28%	38%	28%

Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity the respondents were overwhelmingly white, 146 (97%). This reflects the 'All colleges' figure of 94%. Four (3%) categorized themselves as 'Other or mixed origins', and one respondent was Chinese. The demographic characteristics of the college respondents are very similar to the national demographics, which suggests that the college respondents are reasonably representative, and therefore adds weight to the important differences with the responses. The ethnic mix of staff in colleges is a cause for concern nationally as it doesn't reflect society as a whole.

Analysis of the Responses

The raw data analysing the responses to the 38 statements were received from FEDA on 17 September 2000 and they were distributed to Principal Y, the Vice-Principal, and the Director of Human Resources, the following day.

My initial attempts at analysing the responses and comparing the college with the national figures are shown in the two memoranda below: the first dated 18 September 2000 and addressed to the Vice-Principal. I also held a meeting with him to explain and underline the seriousness of the findings. The depth of my concern related to the high

degree of dissatisfaction expressed by staff with the management, and how this exceeded the national figures. In addition I didn't feel comfortable in relating that analysis to the Principal and the rest of the Executive, hence my decision to communicate by memorandum. This also provided a formal record of the results, and passed the responsibility onto the Principal to decide how much should be disseminated. Consequently, the memorandum to all the Executive, including the Vice-Principal, dated 19 September 2000 contains the same analysis but expressed a little less forcefully, but perhaps a little more clear. As will be seen, the reaction to the results of the survey is as significant as the results themselves.

CONFIDENTIAL

To: Vice-Principal
From: Peter Lycett
Date: 18 September 2000
Re: FEDA Staff Satisfaction Survey

INITIAL ANALYSIS

Benchmarking comparisons with the other colleges in the survey suggest some significant variation between The Isle of Wight College's staff satisfaction and that of staff in other colleges.

- I. In terms of what staff see as being important or unimportant, the Isle of Wight staff reflected the national view, i.e. they thought all the statements were important, and those statements which they saw as slightly less important were the same namely:
 - I am not thinking of leaving the College
 - I would recommend the College as a good place to work
 - Staff are encouraged to take risks or try new things without fear of failure

Whilst these three were seen as being less important than the other 35 statements, they were still seen as being important or very important by most staff.

2. The degree to which Isle of Wight staff agreed or disagreed with the statements was significantly different from the Colleges as a whole. These significant differences fall into three broad categories:
 - The degree of dissatisfaction is greater in the Isle of Wight on average than is the case in all the colleges surveyed.
 - The order in which the degree of satisfaction appears is different i.e. the Isle of Wight staff are significantly less satisfied (never more satisfied) than the national average with regard to a number of statements
 - The depth of dissatisfaction with some areas is far greater than the

national average namely:

The College has a reputation for the quality of its provision

- I feel I have security
- Staff feel they have job security
- The college has a good future.

- 3, The management style elicits deep dissatisfaction with only 23% agreeing that “Management are effective in making decisions about the organisation; and only 20% agree that “communication is effective in this college!”

CONCLUSION

An initial analysis shows a staff fearful for their jobs, unimpressed with the management and working in a college with a poor reputation.

In a more positive vein they think we are good at encouraging feedback, have committed staff, equal opportunities are embedded in the college and staff believe they understand their roles and contribution to achieving the goals of the college.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

There is a mass of potentially useful and perhaps even dangerous data here which requires more examination, analysis and reflection. Its usefulness will partly depend upon how it is analysed and presented and to whom it is disseminated.

PETER LYCETT

To: The Executive
From: Peter Lycett
Date: 19 September 2000
Re: FEDA Staff Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey

INITIAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

The questionnaire comprised 38 statements, which respondents were firstly asked to rank in terms of their importance, and then to rank them by the degree of agreement or disagreement. The initial analysis from FEDA provides a statistical comparison between the 153 respondents from The Isle of Wight College and the 9515 respondents from all 80 colleges taking part in the survey.

SUMMARY

The Isle of Wight College staff generally reflected the national view with regard to the relative importance/unimportance of the statements. Isle of Wight staff believe that all of the statements are important.

The degree to which Isle of Wight staff agreed or disagreed with the statements varied significantly from the 80 colleges as a whole. The level of satisfaction (FEDA's term is used synonymously with agreement) is approximately half that of the national average. The statements ranked by degree of agreement also vary significantly in the Isle of Wight College. The depth of disagreement or dissatisfaction is much greater in the Isle of Wight, with some statements registering much lower rates of agreement/satisfaction than occurs nationally.

FINDINGS

Importance of the statements

All 38 statements were deemed to be important by a large percentage. The level of importance and the variations correlate very closely with the national statistics. Unsurprisingly the statements selected by FEDA appear to accurately reflect the issues that matter greatly to staff.

Agreement/Satisfaction

It is with these results that the Isle of Wight college staff vary significantly from the national results.

1. Nationally staff agreed with 20 of the 38 statements i.e. felt positive and satisfied with just over half of the aspects of their colleges as indicated by the chosen survey statements. On the Isle of Wight, College staff only agreed with 11 of the 38 statements. On the Isle of Wight, staff are half as satisfied as the national average and are only satisfied with just over a quarter of the aspects of the college measured by the survey.

2. The eleven statements, which elicit agreement and positive satisfaction, are attached, as are the lowest scoring statements.

3. The 'me' statements

These elicit the most agreements, with Isle of Wight staff feeling positive about themselves, but they do not feel valued, secure or consulted. They would not recommend the college as a good place to work.

They do feel they receive sufficient training, understand their roles and receive support from their managers, but with the exception of training which matches the national average, they rate a lower level of satisfaction than the national average.

Half the staff are thinking of leaving the college.

4. The 'staff' statements

They believe that the staff work well together in teams, and are committed to improving the quality of all aspects of the college.

All other statements result in overall negative responses, with just 6% of staff feeling they have job security (the national figure is 36%).

5. Management Style Statements

The four statements elicit high levels of dissatisfaction as measured by disagreement with the statements.

6. Communication Statements

Communication is not seen to be effective internally, although information is thought to be made readily available externally.

7. Customers Statements

Staff believe that the college encourages feedback from all its customers. This achieves the highest agreement rating of 80%, which is actually above the national average of 77%. 53% agree that these complaints are then dealt with

effectively (the national figure is 63%).

8. College Statements

Staff are positive about the way equal opportunities are embedded into the culture of the college (62%, the national figure is 75%)

All the other statements elicit disagreements/dissatisfaction, with only 25% believing the college genuinely cares about the welfare of its staff (nationally 37%), and only 26% think that the college has a reputation for the quality of its provision (nationally 66%) — this is one of the greatest disparities between Isle of Wight and the national figures.

These two memoranda resulted in informal talks between myself and individual members of the executive, and an invitation to present my findings to a meeting of the Executive on 21 September 2000. The meeting proved to be a second pivotal point in the research. My findings were to be the first and major item on the agenda for the regular weekly meeting of the Executive. I hoped to raise the issues highlighted by the survey and to generate a debate on how to address those issues.

The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm with Principal Y, the Director of Human Resources and the Director of Curriculum, present. Two members of the Executive were missing: the Vice-Principal, absent due to illness and the Director of Finance. Her absence was inauspicious as Principal Y announced that she would be arriving at the meeting after my item had been dealt with, as 'she had some important financial matters to deal with'. The clear implication was that the results of the FEDA Staff Satisfaction Survey were not of the highest importance. The Vice-Principal's absence was also unhelpful as he had always been a strong supporter of my research in general and the FEDA survey in particular.

I was asked to present my analysis of the survey results by reference to my memorandum dated 19 September 2000, and did so by highlighting those aspects where college staff responses were significantly different from the national results. I emphasized the seriousness of the survey results and how they reflected some of the views expressed by my repertory grid interviewees. However, it became immediately apparent that the mood of the three members of the Executive did not match my own.

As I started to go through the findings and reached the high levels of staff dissatisfaction with the management style, the Principal started to laugh, almost sniggering like a naughty schoolboy who had just been caught out, but didn't really care. This was amazingly accompanied by the Director of Human Resources claiming that she 'thought it a healthy sign that the Principal and Chief Executive could laugh at these awful results.' I found both their reactions extraordinary, but continued until the Principal asked me how good I thought the survey instrument was. I replied that it appeared appropriate with a well-designed questionnaire.

The Director of HR then tried to minimise the survey's value by saying 'how few people had responded, only 153,' and by stating that 'it was probably skewed by the disaffected people all completing the questionnaires, whilst the 'good' people hadn't bothered'. This assertion caused me a moment's hesitation, but I chose not to attempt an immediate defence of the survey, but continued to highlight what were to me the very worrying levels of dissatisfaction, particularly the very widespread fear of losing their jobs. I also emphasised the positive aspects of the results, namely that staff do feel positive about themselves, that the college communicates well with its community and that the staff do feel they receive sufficient training, understand their roles and receive support from their managers. I concluded my outline with what I believed to be the greatest concerns expressed by staff: that they do not feel valued, secure or consulted, and they would not recommend the college as a good place to work. Specifically 50% of the respondents are thinking of leaving the college, and a mere 6% of staff feel they have job security, when the national figure was 36%.

I expected the discussion of the survey to continue, with the beginnings of strategies to address these staff concerns. But if it did continue, it was without me, for the session concluded with the Principal expressing concern about the dissemination of the survey data and my analysis. He was very concerned about it 'getting into the wrong hands', particularly The County Press. I agreed to keep the data and my analysis completely confidential. The meeting had lasted barely fifteen minutes when I left.

Following this meeting I reflected on its implications, and the more I reflected, the more serious they became. One issue was its effect on my relationship with the Executive in general, and the Principal in particular. This was the second meeting I had held with Principal Y where I had gone away convinced that he did not care about the college or appreciate the severe problems it had. Increasingly he appeared to me to be one of those problems. The second issue was the meeting's effect on my research. How could I instigate an action research intervention, when one of the major levers of change would not acknowledge, to me at least, a shared understanding of the need for change? In one sense this was understandable on his part, for how could he publicly accept that he was part of the problem? This had important implications for the further development of my research, including questions about confidentiality, the openness of my research to the participants. It also raised some unpleasant questions about my own position in the college and my working relationships with colleagues. My immediate concern was how to field the requests for feedback from the FEDA survey, and how to manage the already poor, and fast deteriorating relationship between the Vice-Principal and Principal.

During the following two weeks I continued to meet separately with the Vice-Principal, and with the Director of HR, in order to find an agreed format for the FEDA results and an appropriate channel for their distribution. I had to find a way of maintaining my own integrity, and trying to use the research and analysis in a positive way, whilst also being sensitive to my position in the college and relationship with my line manager. The nature of the collaborative process inherent in action enquiry is not an easy process, as highlighted by Ellis and Kiely (2000). The unexpected, and to some participants unwelcome, results of the research presented me with major difficulties. This difficult period was partially resolved with my Report on FEDA Staff Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey, which was presented to the Director of HR and the Vice-Principal on 8 October 2000, shown below as Figure 10.7. The agreement was that the Director of HR would present an outline of the findings at the next all-college 'Principal's Briefing'. These briefings are held approximately every two months, and consist of the Principal or another member of the Executive giving a half hour presentation on a topic during a Friday lunchtime, to which all staff are invited to attend.

I was invited to a meeting of a sub-committee of the Academic Board to present the survey findings and my analysis, which I did, and this elicited a lively and interesting debate. However, that was the only occasion when I was able formally to disseminate the results and attempt a real intervention. Otherwise the report was quietly shelved and my suggestions headed 'The Way Forward' at the end of the report were neither acted on nor properly discussed. However, the FEDA survey was to be referred to many times by colleagues and indeed by the Principal and the Director of HR as shall be seen later.

Figure 10.7

Report on FEDA Staff Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey

1 INTRODUCTION

The analysis from FEDA provides a statistical comparison between the 153 respondents from the Isle of Wight College and the 9515 respondents from the 80 Colleges taking part in the survey. The questionnaire comprised 38 statements, which respondents were firstly asked to rank in terms of their importance and then to rank them by the degree of agreement (positive response) or disagreement (negative response). I have initially divided the statement index between those that elicited a positive response (only eleven statements) and those that elicited a negative response (the remaining 27). The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with 38 statements. The statements were grouped into six categories:

- Me
- Staff
- Management style
- Communication
- Customers
- College

2 SUMMARY

The Isle of Wight College generally reflected the national view with regard to the relative importance/unimportance of the statements i.e. the Isle of Wight College staff believe that all the statements are important.

The degree to which Isle of Wight staff agreed or disagreed with the statements varied significantly from the national analysis. The level of satisfaction (FEDA uses the term satisfaction synonymously with agreement) is approximately half that of the national average. The statements ranked by degree of agreement also varies significantly in the Isle of Wight, with some statements registering much lower rates of agreement/satisfaction than occurs nationally. In broad terms, staff are fairly positive about themselves as individuals at work; have very mixed feelings about the staff in general e.g. they believe they work well together in teams, and are committed to improving the quality of all aspects of the College, but have very little job security; they feel that the College encourages feedback from its customers and deals effectively with complaints; they have mostly negative views about the College, with the exception of equal opportunities being embedded into the culture of the College; they are very critical of the management style and internal communications.

3 POSITIVE (STATEMENTS) RESPONSES

College % in agreement	(National % in agreement in brackets	Statement
80%	(77%)	The College encourages feedback from its customers
66%	(65)	Staff are committed to improving the quality of all aspects of the College
62%	(75)	Equal opportunities are embedded into the culture of the College
61%	(61)	I get sufficient training to do my job effectively
60%	(73)	I understand my role and the contribution I am making to the goals of the College
59%	(72)	Staff work well together in teams
55%	(68)	Information about the College is readily available
54%	(65)	My manager gives me the support I need to do my job effectively
53%	(64)	Complaints are dealt with effectively within the College
50%	(56)	I am not thinking of leaving the College

NEGATIVE RESPONSES

College % in agreement	(National % in brackets)	Statement
48%	(55)	Staff receive appropriate training to make them effective in their job
44%	(56)	Education is central to the management strategy of the College
44%	(55)	Adequate resources are provided by the College for staff
43%	(65)	The College has a good future
42%	(63)	Staff know what they are expected to do
42%	(38)	Adequate resources are provided by the College for students
40%	(47)	Information about strategic and operational goals and performance are communicated effectively
37%	(33)	Staff workplaces are adequate
34%	(29)	There is an opportunity for me to progress within the organisation
34%	(51)	I would recommend the College as a good place to work
34%	(42)	My views are sought and considered
33%	(44)	I feel valued in this organisation
33%	(51)	Staff know how well they are performing
32%	(56)	I get feedback from my manager on the work I do
32%	(45)	Staff are involved in planning improvements and setting targets
30%	(40)	Academic and support staff have shared goals
28%	(38)	Staff are not afraid to say what they really think
27%	(47)	Staff are given the information they need to do their job effectively
26%	(66)	The College has a reputation for the quality of its provision
25%	(37)	The College genuinely cares about the welfare of its staff
25%	(38)	Staff views are sought and considered
23%	(38)	Management are effective in making decisions about the organisation
21%	(33)	Management see complaints as opportunities for improvement rather than threats
20%	(48)	I feel I have security
20%	(30)	Communication is effective in this College
13%	(28)	Staff are encouraged to take risks or try new things without fear of failure
6%	(36)	Staff feel they have job security

5 ANALYSIS

- 1. An excellent 80% of College respondents believe that the College encourages feedback from its customers, which is marginally above the national average of 77%.**
- 2. The 66% who believe that “staff are committed to improving the quality of all aspects of the College matches the national average of 65%.**
- 3. 61% believe they receive sufficient training that matches the national average.**
- 4. The other statements that elicit positive responses are all below the national average.**
- 5. Staff workplaces and resources for students, whilst eliciting negative responses, are seen to be better at the College than is the case nationally.**
- 6. More staff (34%) see an opportunity to progress within the organisation compared with a national figure of 29%. This may reflect the opportunities created by the recent re-organisation.**
- 7. Only six statements caused a greater degree of agreement at the Isle of Wight College than occurred nationally**
- 8. The extent of the negative responses is significantly very high, both in statistical terms and in absolute numbers of staff who are not satisfied.**
- 9. Whilst this general dissatisfaction is evident, it is striking in some areas where it varies from the benchmark figures by 15-20% or in one case by 40%. These statements indicate some deep-rooted areas of dissatisfaction and concern, and are highlighted in the next section.**

6 AREAS OF HIGHEST DIS-SATISFACTION

- 1. Only 6% of respondents felt that staff had job security (nationally it was 36%), and 20% felt that they individually had job security (nationally 48%). This striking level of insecurity surely influenced many of the responses, but cannot wholly explain some of the other significant areas for concern.**
- 2. All the internal communication statements drew high levels of dissatisfaction. This was stressed with a number of statements.**
- 3. Only 43% of respondents felt the College has a good future compared to a national figure of 65%.**

4. Only 34% would recommend the College as a good place to work (nationally 51%)
5. A mere 26% agreed that “the College has a reputation for the quality of its provision; nationally the figure is 66%. This really is a frighteningly low figure.

(It is worth mentioning that many of these findings confirm the results from my own research, even though I used different research methods and have been exploring different aspects of the College. The conclusions can be summarised as “Staff rate themselves, but they do not rate the College”.)

7 THE WAY FORWARD

1. Once the Executive sanctions the release of the survey data, I could put the 38 statements along with the two sets of percentages (College and National) on the Intranet, along with e-mail informing colleagues. In addition FEDA’s raw statistics could be placed in the Library, thus being made accessible to anyone who wanted them.
2. The statements plus the percentages could be distributed to all senior managers, with those statements particularly applicable to their areas highlighted. This could inform their SSARS and Strategic/Operational plans and target setting. This would use the negative and positive responses in a constructive way.
3. Table the raw statistics with the Governors and Academic Board.
4. The Director of Human Resources could use a staff briefing session to highlight the findings and put them into the context of the OPTIMA Survey and associated activities.
5. I would be willing to provide feedback and analysis to any groups or committees you deemed appropriate.

**Peter Lycett
October 2000**

Further analyses on the FEDA survey were provided on 18 October 2000. These provide comparisons of the college staff’s written comments with those made by all colleges (including general FE colleges, sixth form and specialist colleges), and comparisons with the college’s own sector ie general FE colleges.

Throughout the whole survey there were significant differences in the responses given to some of the statements, according to gender and age, but the main differences in agreement were between the different types of employment category, with perhaps unsurprisingly those respondents who classified themselves as senior managers being less concerned with poor management.

The Isle of Wight College's respondents were more concerned with the poor management style – 20% as against a national average of 15%, and with the level of morale, 10% as against a national figure of 5% (for senior managers this figure was a mere 1%).

In the next month, (November 2000), I received FEDA's own analysis of the free text responses from the college's respondents. They also provided a list of the general issues raised by virtually all the colleges, as shown in Figure 10.8. FEDA's analysis of the college's responses was very anodyne, either because they didn't want to antagonise an individual college or their depth of analysis was simply too shallow. Even their list of issues raised by all the colleges was too general. This gave me the further impetus to analyse the free text responses more deeply because even a cursory glance at them revealed a more important story, and this led to the analysis in the next chapter.

Figure 10.8

FEDA Survey Issues raised in virtually all colleges.

- The need to empower staff and involve them in decision making
- The divide between department, staff and management, teaching and non-teaching staff and between permanent and contract staff
- The additional workload burden caused by admin and the perceived bureaucracy of quality systems
- The effect that casualisation of contracts has on teamwork and morale
- Salary, particularly in relation to the school sector
- The perceived emphasis on business and finance over education
- The need to see success in terms of more than exam results

FEDA's summary of The Isle of Wight College's free text responses states, 'As would be expected with any satisfaction survey, the comments made tend to be negative, though some colleges did receive compliments. The comments should be viewed as issues that cause dissatisfaction rather than a balanced view of the college. However, it is important that all colleges take note of these views. Staff will be waiting to see whether their opinions have been acknowledged and what action will be planned as a result.'

This summary is shown in Figure 10.9

Figure 10.9

Summary of free text responses from the staff satisfaction Survey (summer 2000)

The Isle of Wight College

Almost all comments were concerned with the recent changes of management and restructuring at the college. Most respondents wanted to see a change of culture. This was variously described as moving away from a culture of *blame, crisis, secrecy, and uncertainty*, to one of *stability and openness*.

Staff looked for a new management structure and SMT. They also wanted effective communication and consultation with all staff through new clear structures. This would include informal contact and communication with senior managers including the Principal. Staff looked to the Principal to set clear goals and communicate them effectively to all staff. Particular ideas for communication included regular divisional meetings, occasional whole staff meetings and a staff “away day”. Several respondents asked for more attention to the public image of the college.

There was a balance in many responses between a willingness to give the new Principal and his team support in trying to turn things round’, and a mistrust of existing managerial structures.

Two other significant themes emerged:

- **Improve the college environment** — several staff thought the learning environment should be improved both generally and in the classroom. Staff facilities were also generally seen as poor with a need to upgrade buildings generally.
- **Focus on quality** — several staff wanted a focus on identifying and sustaining good practice, and dealing effectively with poor performance. Many wanted a more whole-college approach to the curriculum, and several mentioned the need to improve student guidance and support and initial assessment.

The FEDA summary of the free text responses provided some useful points although the steer that FEDA is taking and giving to the college is not supported by my analysis of the responses. They have no real grounds for their steer, other than to appease the stakeholders who commissioned and paid for the survey. Despite these misgivings about FEDA's analysis, I distributed it to the college Executive, with a covering memorandum. Disappointingly I received no response from the Principal, but he did introduce some changes in communications with whole college briefings and small informal meetings with himself, although these initiatives could have taken place independently of the FEDA survey. There was a telling coda to the FEDA survey, which took place at one of the new irregular Friday morning informal group meetings with the Principal.

The meeting took place on 24 November 2000. The eight people assembled including myself, were drawn from across the college and included academic and support staff, plus the Principal. The stated intention was to provide an informal channel for the exchange of views.

We sat on low chairs in the Principal's office, and essentially just listened to his views and opinions, which surrounded the small pieces of news about the college. The questions from the eight were few and anodyne, and there was no real interaction within the group. It reminded me of job interviews, where the candidates are first collected together and taken to the presence of the Principal, where they dutifully and attentively listen to her or his vision of the college and other related opinions. The atmosphere on such occasions is invariably reserved with little connection between the participants or

any willingness to engage in an exchange of meaningful views. However, despite the strained atmosphere, the Principal did express some unprompted noteworthy opinions about the FEDA survey. This occurred during the first item on the agenda entitled OPTIMA Training. He said that the OPTIMA survey would be combined with 'team building activities'. He added that although there would be another survey carried out by OPTIMA it would be different because 'I don't like the FEDA survey because it doesn't get to the things we want. I loathe theoreticians and consultants who haven't done it, but I like OPTIMA because they are practical, not theoreticians'. This assertion elicited no reaction from the assembled colleagues, let alone a challenge from me, indicating an unwillingness to engage in open debate by all of us.

From that day it became apparent that my attempts to use the FEDA survey as a lever to achieve change would probably be unsuccessful. However, there was another major aspect of the survey requiring further analysis and perhaps that would provide the spark. These were the written answers to the open questions. I was sure that they contained more information than was apparent in FEDA's rather anodyne summary. The analysis of this data appears next in chapter eleven.

Chapter 11

Exploring Staff Perspectives

Part Two – The FEDA Survey, The Free Text Responses

'Fear is the key.' Alistair MacLean

The two open questions at the end of the FEDA questionnaire elicited 119 written responses referred to by FEDA as free text responses, out of the 153 in total who completed the closed questions, which I refer to as the whole survey (nobody responded solely to the free text questions without also answering the closed questions). These free text responses generated much interesting data, perhaps even more interesting than the responses to the closed questions. Yet again the significance of the data lies not just in the analysis itself, but also in the executive's response to it, and the way in which I utilized the information and the implications this had for my action research. Once more I will tell the story with a mix of formal analysis, statistics, reflections and where appropriate the actual documents used, in chronological order. Also once more there are other events taking place during this time, which are pertinent to the whole process, and these events are also included.

Analysis of the Demographic Classification

In terms of employment status the greatest number of free text responses came from the full-time academic staff (39.5%) followed by full-time support staff (35.29%). This was a reversal of the overall responses to the questionnaire, when the full-time support staff formed the largest group of respondents. Part-time support staff constituted 9.42% of

the free text responses and part-time academic staff 6.72%. This displayed a relative increase in the number of part-time academic staff compared to the whole survey responses when they constituted 5% compared to the part-time support staff of 13%. All six respondents who classified themselves as heads of departments or members of the senior management team provided free text responses. Excluding the unclassified gender respondents, there were 60% female and 40% male. This compares to a whole survey response of 65% female and 35% male. The male respondents are more likely to make written responses, 83% as opposed to 69% of the female respondents. The age ranges of the free question respondents and their ethnic origin were very similar to the whole survey respondents. In summary, more full-time academic staff and male staff were willing to provide written responses. It is interesting to see the percentage of each category that was willing to express their views in the free response questions. The data is shown in the following Figures 11.1 to 11.3.

Figure 11.1

**FEDA Survey – Free Text Responses
Employment Status of Respondents**

Category	Number of Free Text Respondents	% of whole survey responses	% of responses
Full-time academic	47	90%	39%
Full-time support	42	65%	35%
Part-time academic	8	100%	7%
Part-time support	11	58%	9%
Head of Department	5	100%	4%
SMT	1	100%	2%
Unclassified	<u>5</u>	-	4%
	119		

Figure 11.2

FEDA Survey – Free Text Responses as a % of College Staff

Employment category	Number of Respondents	% of College Staff
Full-time academic*	53	42%
Full-time support	42	29%
Hourly paid (academic and support)	19	8%

* including HoD and SMT, who I have assumed are classified as academic staff in the college statistics.

The FEDA Analysis

FEDA provided a summary of the free text responses for the college by letter dated 9 November 2000, this is provided in full in the previous chapter. I have presented FEDA's analysis of the free text responses in Figure 11.3, where the College's responses are compared with those from all the colleges surveyed. The responses are split between those answers to the question "if there were to be one action to be taken that would improve the culture of the College, what would it be?" and the second question, "is there anything else you would like to raise?"

Figure 11.3

College and Overall Survey Results of the Free Text Responses

FEDA's Analysis

	All colleges		IOW College	
	No.	%	No.	%
Action to be taken:				
Poor management/management style	1438	15%	31	20%
Communication/consultation/involvement	1274	13%	29	19%
Salary/conditions/reward/progress	605	6%	1	1%
Teaching/support staff or interdepartmental relationship or conflict	594	6%	12	8%
College's resources/condition/IT	583	6%	10	7%
Value staff/morale	579	6%	16	10%
Workload/paperwork/flexibility	460	5%	8	5%
Education/student v finance focus	347	4%	5	3%
Student discipline/attitude/issues	236	2%		
Equal opps/recruitment/favouritism	156	2%	1	1%
Training	114	1%	3	2%
Poor inappropriate staff	103	1%	2	1%
Restructuring/changes	62	1%	4	3%
Other	572	6%	17	11%
Points raised:				
Salary/conditions/reward/progress	696	7%	10	7%
Poor management/management style	637	7%	23	15%
College's resources/condition/IT	506	5%	6	4%
Communication/consultation/involvement	358	4%	9	6%
Value staff/morale	352	4%	13	8%
Workload/paperwork/flexibility	312	3%	4	3%
Teaching/support staff or interdepartmental relationship or conflict	179	2%	5	3%
Education/student v finance focus	169	2%	5	3%
Equal opps/recruitment/favouritism	137	1%	8	5%
Student discipline/attitude/issues	78	1%	1	1%
Good place to work etc	76	1%	1	1%
Training	76	1%		
Restructuring/changes	62	1%	5	3%
Poor inappropriate staff	51	1%	1	1%
Other	<u>530</u>	6%	<u>8</u>	5%
	9515		153	

There are some "significant" differences between the college responses compared to the national ones, notably the poor management/management style that constitutes 20% of

the college responses as one action to be taken, compared to 15% of responses by staff in all colleges, and constitutes 15% of college staff responses as something else they wished to raise. This is twice the national figure of 7%. Secondly the issue of valuing staff and morale forms 8% of the college responses in answer to both questions, whilst nationally it is 6% and 4%. Thirdly, communication/consultation/involvement makes up 19% of college responses as something requiring action, but only 13% nationally. Meanwhile salary/conditions/reward/progress elicited 6% of responses nationally but only 1% of the college responses, as an action to be taken, although it constitutes 7% as another point raised both nationally and by college responses.

It could be concluded that these responses reinforce the view that the three issues of management, communication and morale may be greater causes of ineffectiveness at the Isle of Wight College than is the case nationally. Once more this gave me difficulties in presenting the findings to the key decision makers, notably the Principal and Executive, and engaging in the kind of meaningful intervention required by the action research. I found it difficult to present findings that essentially said to the recipients 'you are a major part of the problem'. Consequently I settled for simply duplicating the correspondence and raw data from FEDA (essentially Figure 11.3), set out as separate tables on different sheets of paper) which I despatched to Principal Y, the Vice-Principal and the Director of HR on 10 November 2000. This resulted in a discussion between myself and Carl Groves about the issues highlighted, but elicited no response, not even an acknowledgement from Principal Y and the Director of HR.

However, it did perhaps result in an attempt to improve communications, and the FEDA survey was referred to by the Principal, and both these episodes are of interest to this story. One of these, the informal meeting with the Principal, is described in the previous chapter (n.b. these informal meetings ceased to take place early in 2001; there was no official announcement to this effect). The negative references made by the Principal about the FEDA survey at this meeting reinforced my private view that gaining acceptance of the nature of the problem, let alone agreement as to solutions, was going to prove too difficult for me.

This view was confirmed in the next month, December 2000, with the departure from the college of the Vice-Principal. His leaving removed my main supporter for change and potential change agent. He alone of the Executive had been positively supportive of my action research project. Therefore his departure itself caused me to re-examine the potential for any intervention. However, the nature of his departure caused many in the college, including myself even greater concern. The following narrative is included at this point, because it affected the next stage of my research, and also because it illustrates the nature of the college's management.

The Vice-Principal was made redundant on 19 December 2000. This decision was conveyed formally to the staff via the Principal's Bulletin Number 20 during the second week of January 2001. It is worth quoting from this bulletin (Figure 11.4) because it was widely seen by staff as a mean-spirited statement by the Principal as it contains no personal message of thanks to someone who had worked at the college for 17 years.

Principal's Bulletin No 20 (extract)

“On the 11 December I confirmed to the Staff Governors and NATHE that, following a discussion with the Governing Body, I was planning a restructuring of the College Executive.

During formal discussions held on 19 December, it was confirmed to Carl what his own position would be following this restructuring. As a result, Carl concluded that it would be preferable to accept severance terms so that he could explore other career opportunities. Carl's contract, therefore, will be officially terminated on 31 January 2001, subject to the conclusion of a written agreement between the Corporation and Carl, and until that date he will be working from home.

The Governors have asked that mention be made in this bulletin of Carl's contribution to the college, which over a period of some 17 years, has spanned every teaching and managerial level in the college. This includes two periods as temporary Principal, the latter at a time of great uncertainty for the future of the college, and his achievements as Vice-Principal, particularly in relation to Strategic Planning, Quality Improvement and ILT Development. They wish him well for his future career.”

The Vice-Principal's departure was a further setback for my intended action research intervention, as he was the most supportive member of the Executive, both as Acting Principal, when I started my research and as Vice-Principal during the latter stages of my research. He was both encouraging and interested in the research findings and analysis. Unfortunately as we have seen, Principal Y and the other members of the Executive feigned little or no interest in the findings, presumably because they reflected badly on themselves and did not support their public contention that the college was improving largely as a result of their managerial expertise. As I reflected on recent events and wrote down these thoughts on 27 January 2001 it became clear that the only intervention I could effect would be the partial dissemination of my analysis, combined with a few general proposals. The FEDA survey itself was linked with the Vice-Principal as he alone of the Executive had supported me in carrying it out, and so its findings in their eyes were tainted, consequently any suggested intervention from me on the basis of the FEDA survey became impossible. I also had to protect my own employment position, as I felt increasingly vulnerable.

Why was the Vice-Principal essentially dismissed from the college? I believe it was because he and the Principal came to simply loathe one another. The Vice-Principal believed that he deserved to be Principal as he had been acting Principal twice, and he was particularly put out at not even receiving an interview for Principal Y's post. In addition he despised Principal Y for being a carpetbagger who cared nothing for the college and the Island, and who saw it only as a stepping-stone on the way to higher ambitions. Finally he saw Principal Y as an ineffective manager and leader. Meanwhile

Principal Y hated the Vice-Principal as he saw him as a threat to his power, an alternative power base and an irritant who questioned his decisions.

Chilworth Manor – Two-Day Management Development Residential 2 and 3 February 2001

This event exemplified the Principal's unwillingness to acknowledge and deal with the problems as identified by the staff. It consisted of a two-day residential 'conference' held near Southampton, a venue chosen because it was not on the Island. It was attended by the Principal, Executive, senior cross-college managers (including myself) and Programme Area Managers, 23 people in total. The event commenced with the Principal delivering a keynote address, which he billed as an 'overview', and consisted of a list of 'the college's nine weaknesses'. These weaknesses were displayed on an OHP but were not distributed, consequently copying them down felt like a faintly illicit activity. His nine weaknesses of the college were set out as follows:

1 Inefficient

- Staffing
- Class sizes
- Competence
- Some staff with limited perceptions

2 Poor but improving public image

- Over critical Island culture
- 'burden of history'

3 Lack of formalised and developed links with other Island post-16 providers

4 Poor financial state

- 'Dependent on the goodwill of others'
 - run down buildings
- 5 Overemphasis on paperwork and not action
 - Reduce bureaucracy
 - Focus on key outcomes and less on processes
 - 6 Under-developed management capacity in the college
 - 7 Overly broad curriculum
 - Centres of excellence may help with this
 - LSC will in all probability encourage the narrowing of the range of the college's offer
 - 8 Fear of the past
 - Taylorism (a reference to the previous Principal X)
 - The rumour-mill
 - 9 Quality is not a strength of the college

He talked through this list, which was essentially his view of the college's weaknesses as if he had carried out a SWOT analysis, but there was no list of strengths, opportunities or threats. He then followed the nine weaknesses with the four issues he intended to address over the next year. Again there was no accompanying papers, only an OHP slide displaying:

- 1 Quality
- 2 Financial stability
- 3 Premises and Facilities

4 Image and attention to our customers

His address lasted just over half an hour, there were no questions and none were asked for, and it ended with him encouraging the assembled managers to have a productive two days, and “to be assured that there was no ulterior motive behind the event, as it was not being used as a covert assessment process to help in identifying unwanted managers.” This announcement, far from putting colleagues at ease, as was presumably intended, had the opposite effect judging by their faces, and a spectre was raised which was to haunt the next two days.

It was noticeable how the Principal’s list of nine weaknesses and four issues to be addressed, was so different from the concerns and issues raised by staff and other stakeholder groups in my research, the salient points of which had been conveyed to him. His inability to acknowledge or accept the problems of management, communication and culture was once more evident.

On the following day a very useful opportunity presented itself for me to make a positive intervention and utilise some of my research. This was unexpected but very welcoming. The Programme Area Managers formed one group, and myself along with the other senior managers and the Executive formed another group, which split again into three smaller groups, each of which was to come up with a maximum of seven suggestions for improving either the college’s culture, curriculum or external relations. I joined the group exploring the college’s culture and used it as an opportunity to disseminate some of my research findings and to promote change in the college. I used the analysis

contained in Figure 11.4 as the basis for what proved to be a positive and useful discussion. Our suggestions, which were shared with the other two groups, were:

- The members of the executive to recognise achievement, to be more visible, to walk around meeting with people and acknowledging them; and to do this on a regular basis
- To provide free tea and coffee in a refurbished staff room in order to encourage managers and staff from across the college to meet and thus improve communications
- The abolition of named and reserved car parking space for senior staff and others. This it was felt would help to promote equality of esteem and break down barriers
- For the Executive to congratulate staff and students for their achievements. Again on a regular basis, not just once a year at the awards ceremony
- To set up small cross-college, cross-functional project groups empowered to make small yet measurable changes, eg to the external environment or signage. The issues could be identified from the FEDA survey, or through a suggestions box

These five suggestions resulted in quite heated discussions, as colleagues found it difficult to accept the idea of relinquishing some of their management prerogative to small project groups. It was also quite difficult to tell the Principal and the Executive that their communications were poor, and that they needed to improve their social skills. However, the Principal agreed to transcribe the suggestions and to prioritise them. This

positive note was somewhat marred by the Principal's closing remarks that 'we must all sell the positive effects of these two days when we get back to college, because if anybody was critical or disparaging about the event when talking to other members of staff, I will come after them.' This was delivered in a 'mock' threatening voice accompanied by finger pointing and glare. It was possibly meant as a joke, but resulted in no laughter or smiles. As I write this, six months later, the list of priorities has not been produced by Principal Y, neither have any of the suggestions been acted upon.

Where did this leave my research? It may have diminished the opportunities for major interventions, although I was continuing to make more subtle interventions by influencing people's thinking through discussions and the dissemination of reports. In addition it still left me with a great deal of rich data, which I determined to continue analysing. Some of this analysis I would disseminate whilst the majority would have to remain confidential to the University. As I returned to the FEDA analysis of the free text responses I realised that the three striking concerns of college staff i.e. management, communications and morale warranted further analysis. I also felt that there was much more to be uncovered in the 119 sets of free text responses.

Analysis of the Free Text Responses using NVivo Software

I had kept photocopies of the 119 free text responses on the 153 questionnaires completed at the college and transcribed them into the QSR NUD*IST Vivo (NVivo) software. This package enables the researcher to analyse qualitative data in many more ways than would be possible using traditional paper-based analyses. The NVivo software was used to code the rich data provided by the Free Text Responses qualitative data, and to assess a series of analyses. It enabled me to continually examine the data, code, annotate, assess links and explore the patterns of data and ideas. It was particularly valuable in allowing the integration of reflection and recorded data.

This qualitative research has involved me in the management of complex data, and I was aided in this management by the NVivo software, although at times its own technical complexity put up temporary barriers to understanding. However, I benefited greatly from being able to explore possible patterns, connections and hidden 'truths' in the data, which would otherwise have proved impossible.

Once the 119 free text responses were transcribed and given a unique identifier (FEDA 1 to FEDA 119), each was classified according to the age, gender, occupation and ethnic origin information provided by the respondents. The next stage was to code all the responses. This involved continually reading, re-reading, and identifying key words and phrases until I felt comfortable with all the coding categories. I wanted to see if there were themes that related to effectiveness, but at the same time I did not want to pre-judge the analysis. Consequently the coding involved many cycles of reflexivity, and

explorations of the connections between the comments, themes and characteristics of the respondents. Eventually, after five months, every comment in the 119 responses was coded including nine comments that were impossible to classify (these are of course coded 'uncoded'). In total I identified 41 themes, each of which received unique code. A total of 421 codings were made. Many of the respondents' comments would be coded more than once eg a reference to management might also refer to morale.

A list of the codes and an outline of their potential use is shown in the following memorandum sent to the College Executive. This shows my final categories, and also illustrates my continuing if declining inclination to disseminate my research to the key decision makers.

Figure 11.4

Memorandum

To: The Executive:
Principal Y and Chief Executive
Director of Human Resources
Director of Finance and Management Services

From: Peter Lycett

Date: 4 July 2001

Subject: **FEDA Survey – Analysis of the ‘Free’ Responses**

I have carried out an analysis of the ‘free’ responses or answers to the open questions in the FEDA Staff Survey conducted last year and as you have already received reports and analyses of the closed questions, and the brief analysis provided by FEDA to the open questions, (please see memorandum dated 10 November 2001), this report brings the survey to a conclusion.

The questions posed at the end of the questionnaire were:

- If there were to be one action to be taken that would improve the culture of the College, what would it be?
- Is there anything else you would like to raise?

There was a total of 153 completed questionnaires, and of those, 119 responded to the open questions. I have transcribed these 119 responses and classified them into 41 categories. I have taken the responses to the two questions together, as the respondents usually took the opportunity to make their comments across the two boxes provided on the questionnaire, without noticeably distinguishing between the two questions.

Once I had determined the 41 categories or topics that the responses fell into, I then recorded each time a key word or phrase occurred. Often respondents refer to more than one category or topic within the same sentence or paragraph. My list of topics/categories is of course subjective, but I think it provides you with a very useful list of those topics that concern staff, and even more usefully, the number of times each topic is referred to gives a good indication of its relative importance. However, the most powerful messages may be in the respondents’ own words.

The table below shows this initial analysis.

	Topic/Category	Number of times it occurs
1	accountability	1
2	act	1
3	bullying	2
4	bureaucracy	8
5	communication	51
6	culture	11
7	customer care	3
8	deal with weak performers	3
9	decision making	4
10	environment	8
11	equal opportunities	2
12	equipment	1
13	governors	2
14	information	1
15	job security	9
16	leadership	2
17	management	73
18	marketing	2
19	morale	10
20	morals	2
21	motivation	28
22	organised	2
23	parking	2
24	pay	12
25	PR	4
26	principal	16
27	resources	11
28	staff training	2
29	staffing	6
30	staffroom	3
31	stress	1
32	structure	1
33	student guidance	1
34	support staff are not listened to	3
35	teamwork	7
36	time	3
37	trainers	2
38	uncoded	9
39	values	11
40	vision	1
41	workload	3
	Total	421

The respondents also categorized themselves as to their age, ethnicity, employment category and gender by answering the following questions:

How old are you? Under 30 31-40 41-50 51 or over **Are you:** male
female

Would you describe yourself as:

Black African Bangladeshi Chinese
Black Caribbean Indian White
Black other Pakistani Other or mixed origins

Please indicate in which of the following categories you are employed:

Part-time academic staff Part-time support staff
Full-time academic staff Full-time support staff
Head of School Head of Department
SMT

Suggestions

1. These categories and attributes enable me to produce a great range of reports displaying the full texts, should you require them. For instance, you could have a report on any of the 41 topics/categories, or you could have a report by attribute eg what did the part-time academic staff have to say about communication, or what did everyone have to say about motivation.
2. I could provide similar reports for other individuals or groups eg the governors could receive a report on all the references to governors and the Associate Director for Business Development those references to marketing.
3. I could also circulate this memorandum/report to other colleagues who could select their own reports. You could suggest such a circulation list.
4. I would be very happy to talk to you and outline the possibilities further.

This is included not only for exposition but also to show that I was still attempting interventions, even if they were largely through the dissemination of fairly uncontentious analyses. It also shows that sadly I had long ceased to feel secure enough to be able to provide the Executive with the depth of analysis contained in this dissertation. However, even this analysis contains some very important information. Specifically the Executive could not fail to see the issues that were of greatest concern to the staff. These are set out in figure 11.5 below.

Figure 11.5

**Free Text Responses
Most Frequently Coded Topics**

Topic	Frequency
Management	73
Communication	51
Motivation	28
Principal	16
Pay	12
Resources	11
Culture	11
Values	11
Morale	10

The significance of these codings lies less in the simple numerical totals of the frequency with which a topic is raised, and more in the strength of feelings expressed, hence my suggestions in Figure 11.4 to provide customized reports for the Executive or other interested parties, as an aid to their understanding of the staff.

An illustration of both the usefulness of NVivo, and the significance of the free text responses is the gender classification and exploration of those responses that declined to

specify their gender. The gender of all the respondents and the free text responses is shown in Figure 11.6.

Figure 11.6

No Gender Classification		
Employment Category	Number	%
Full-time academic staff	14	45%
Part-time academic staff	5	16%
Full-time support staff	7	22%
No classification	3	9%
Part-time support staff	1	3%
HoD	1	3%
Total	31	

An examination of the 31 genderless respondents reveals the most robust views of the college management, a selection of these are set out below.

FEDA 117 In general staff work extremely hard to create an atmosphere that is upbeat, encouraging and supportive of those that wish to benefit from their studies, this is achieved sometimes under difficult circumstances. I must stress that all staff make the same contribution and consider the interest.

Bearing this in mind, I feel that it is about time that the college started to immediately emphasise its good aspects in a positive upbeat way. Let's start to 'blow our own trumpet'? Perhaps get students past and present involved - make them feel more part of the college's present and of course future.

Continuing with this theme, please encourage management, to lead the way by giving positive feedback to staff whenever possible. Staff should not be in a position whereby they only have feedback on negative issues. As with the current public persona of the college this too can create an atmosphere of despondency and disillusionment. Would we treat our students in the same way? I think not. As with all good organisations, it is vital that staff are valued and appreciated. So why then do some managers (I must stress not all) not realise the first rule of management

and find it difficult to adopt this approach. It is also important to remember that no feedback on performance or appropriate support is just as detrimental.

FEDA 12 There is an advertisement on TV at the moment depicting 1 person rowing a boat with 8 people all demanding various actions from the rower. I feel like that rower. The boat would move faster and more economically with 8 rowers and 1 person with a megaphone giving out the instructions etc

FEDA 18 If management could recall the basic importance of valuing its staff - perhaps this is about management training.

There is little transparency in operation of college and management motivation and decisions. Corruption is assumed in decisions - based upon history here. Managers seem to be more focused upon self-aggrandizement rather than the overall progress of college.

FEDA 21 Replace the management team!

FEDA 22 Remove the culture of secrecy from management so that front line staff felt that we were all working toward the same goals and not simply trying to cover our backs.

The increase in numbers of middle managers has done little to improve delivery but has given even more experienced staff an excuse to avoid their teaching responsibilities and therefore increased the workload of those 'doing the business'.

FEDA 27 Remove the 'fear culture' that has developed via management tactics and actions. This may occur where and when staff are challenging decisions made.

Staff are 'heard' but not often listened to.

Staff want to see the principal more often and not just at meetings. Most staff want the college and new structure to succeed. Lets hope we can all work together to achieve a common good. This needs flexibility by both parties.

FEDA 3 Isn't it about time we changed the 1980's management style?

FEDA 52 As a teaching member of staff, who has worked here for six years, I feel I want to 'contribute' to the recovery of this college. At the moment, I do not feel this is happening - management make decisions without discussing the practicalities with us and order us to do it. I am a

professional, I want to contribute to the way the college moves forward, and discussions on what is truly best for the students (I think management forgets this!) and for education. A more democratic approach rather than the authoritarian one that currently exists.

I really want to believe in the future of this college - I want to be enthusiastic - and will give my best to achieve this. I want to be proud of the college I work for. Things are very difficult at the moment - we are all shocked and hurting. I want us to grow stronger or more united from this.

FEDA 6 Make sure managers have experience of education off the Island.
Make sure all managers know what they are doing.

FEDA 62 Better and more regular communication between management and staff on all matters. The morale within staff is very low. Everyone fears losing their jobs or more pressures on them and their colleagues have to go. (Too much work - not enough people).

FEDA 65 With staff morale at an all time low due to job insecurity (amongst other things) I feel 'the college' has mis-timed this survey badly - it is yet another nail in the coffin of quality: I was tempted not to complete this survey because of this.

Figure 11.7

Gender of Free Text Responses

Category	Number of Respondents	% of whole survey responses	% of free responses
Female	53	69%	45%
Male	35	83%	29%
Unclassified	31	91%	26%

What was striking was the number of staff who refused to specify their gender: a total of 34 for the whole survey, yet of these, a very high number (31), equal to 91%, provided written responses to the free questions. This may suggest that respondents were

unwilling to reveal their gender because they feared that this would identify them when combined with the other classification data. Yet these people were obviously keen to give their views. I would suggest that fear caused this reticence. Only 3 respondents declined to indicate their employment status; 2 did not indicate their ethnicity and 2 did not indicate their age. Of the 31 who did not state their gender, the largest single category, 14 (45%) were full-time academic staff. This is a significantly higher percentage than would have been predicted from the whole college statistics, and taken with the (16%) part-time academic staff, raises the question, why were the academic staff so unwilling to specify their gender (Figure 11.7) unless they were so fearful or suspicious that they were taking extra precautions to hide their identity. It would be even more worrying if the reason was due to real or perceived sex discrimination.

The Major Themes

The free text responses contain three major themes which are striking both for the number of occasions they occur, and because they exceed as a percentage the national average. A further explanation of the actual responses is even more revealing as it exposes some powerful and strongly held beliefs. These three themes, using FEDDA's categorisation are:

- Poor management/management style
- Communication/consultation/involvement
- Value staff/morale

A Poor management/management style

FEDA's own categorisation identified 30 responses, which referred to poor management style in answer to the question, 'if there were to be one action to be taken that would improve the culture of the college, what would it be?' and there were a further 23 similar responses to the second question, 'is there anything else you would like to raise?' My analysis of the data using the NVivo software identified 73 references to 'management'. These were overwhelmingly critical. The following is a selection of the responses. The respondents are referred to by my coding which is simply FEDA to denote the staff satisfaction survey, followed by a number denoting the individual respondent.

- FEDA 110** If staff feel valued and have the respect and appreciation of management it raises self motivation and accomplishment. People have different gifts, this is to be recognised and valued - excellent teachers don't necessarily make excellent managers.
- FEDA 118** Reduce need to 'crisis' management leading to constant mistakes which impact on financial state of the college.
- Increasing 'ivory tower' syndrome needs to be addressed. Management are more than ever acting in isolation. Them and us attitude on both sides is a constant problem.
- FEDA 13** Put in a new management structure by opening up all positions to any candidate (internal and external). Making sure that those successful were people centred and believed in collegiality.
- This exercise should have been carried out as soon as the new Principal arrived and certainly before he overhauled the management structure.
- FEDA 33** Programme management should be seen as a dynamic full-time role, not a part-time occupation. Programme Area Managers will be buried by administrative tasks, stifling initiative and creativity. The college has developed a 'culture of crisis' over the last two years.
- No more changes! The latest management structure needs to be given plenty of time to deliver its objectives.

FEDA 42

Many staff feel anonymous - in the past management have known names of all staff and of any students. There is a feeling that students and real student needs are being ignored in the decision-making processes.

FEDA 45

SMT to become more visible on the 'shop floor', to be more aware of what life is like for students and staff. If we got to know them, in time, we might trust them. At present I can pass a fortnight or more, moving around college without seeing any of JP, CG, JE etc.

Lack of information - definition of roles at all levels, with staff names.

Who are 'the Governing Body'. Why are they a secret?

Principal wants 'flexibility'. He may be flexible, lecturing staff have been so flexible for so long, they are corkscrews! SMT are perceived as very inflexible!!!

FEDA 47

The development, by management, of a sense of professionalism and trust in their staff.

FEDA 58

The management is not supportive of staff attempting to improve themselves. They also do not seem to want to utilise the capabilities and qualifications of staff.

FEDA 61

Two issues:

i) the college seems to have an history of questionable management credibility

ii) poor communication throughout the organisation

FEDA 8

More assertive, forward planning dealing with specifics not generalities. The current style leads to constant crisis management. I would like to see an honest and open culture being developed in this college. It seems that deceit was the option chosen in the past and staff have been misled into believing that decisions were being made in our, and the students, best interests. I hope the Principal will steer a firm ship and encourage his senior management team to follow his example instead of lapsing back into their old ways.

FEDA 80

I would like to see an honest and open culture being developed in this college. It seems that deceit was the option chosen in the past and staff have been misled into believing that decisions were being made in our, and the students, best interests. I hope the Principal will steer a firm ship and encourage his senior management team to follow his example instead of lapsing back into their old ways.

B Communication/consultation/involvement

FEDA's analysis found a total of 38 references to communication/ consultation/ involvement, and I identified 51 references to communication. Again it seems only apposite to let the staff (respondents) speak for themselves without any interpretation from me.

FEDA 89 Tutors are increasingly expected to carry out administrative tasks, paper pushing, statistics etc. They are the only ones, at present, who know if a student is attending properly and therefore are the first option when support staff need information. Perhaps if there were extra support staff assigned to departments - and if tutors could be relied on to keep them fully informed - much of the pressure could be removed from tutors allowing them to get on with the teaching, and the support staff could keep the all-important paperwork up-to-date.

I am amazed, but not surprised, at the lack of sensitivity in the timing of this survey. With the axe still poised over all staff it seems strange to ask our views on job security and feelings of self-worth. The members of staff who are volunteering to take redundancy form the backbone of the college, with a large number of them having seen many Management teams come - and subsequently go. Most of them will have been giving loyal service on behalf of the college way before the arrival of practically all the present Managers. Will the removal of this 'backbone' lead others to view us as 'spineless' and just a crumpled heap of individual parts - vulnerable and ready for taking over? The Management must do all in its power to encourage cohesion in what is left of the staff. A good starting point would be for the Principal to at least acknowledge members of staff and say 'good morning' when he sees them - that at least would cost the college nothing. When the present Vice-Principal was acting Principal we had weekly meetings to keep all staff informed, as much as was possible, about the 'highs and lows' and the decisions of the previous week. This was much more than a 'pre-match pep talk' but had a similar effect of bringing staff together.

FEDA 9 Management walkabouts within the college by the Principal and Senior Management Team.

Uncertainty is the greatest inhibitor. Communicate often. please, even when there is little new to say. Reinforce the good things which are happening at every opportunity.

FEDA 61 Make available adequate funding 'to develop the full potential of each member of the college community through viable and high-quality learning services.'

Two issues:

i) the college seems to have an history of questionable management creditability

ii)poor communication throughout the organisation

FEDA 63 Employ managers that listen to, and value, their staff. Constant uncertainty re job security and feeling undervalued a constant here - not the best timing for this survey!

FEDA 66 Improve quality of organisation at the college: eg classes not running - let the students know!
more communication between tutors/SMT and support staff (who have to take calls regarding most matters)

Officially let staff know who their line manager is!!!

Keep staff informed - sick of meetings where I ask important questions and am told 'I don't know.' If SMT don't know they should find out.

The way the appointment of Deputy Directors has been handled was very bad. Staff are now working for different line managers - NO-ONE was told officially who their new boss was, all staff muddling along as usual, no-one quite knowing who to give forms to etc. General communication very poor.

FEDA 10 To remove bullying/blame culture.

FEDA 68 That senior managers relay information down to staff on a regular basis and that this information is correct. (All singing from the same hymn sheet).

FEDA 7 Ask the general staff's opinion on issues - involve them in decision making, listen to their opinions. FEDA70 Improved communication between departments. There seems little contact between each department, with staff only seeming to be interested in their own department.

FEDA 73 To listen to the students rather than make decisions which will affect them without their knowledge or consultation.

Management need to be identifiable and approachable to staff, as well as students to enable a beneficial and frank avenue of communication.

FEDA 75 Improved communication at all levels. Work-load and expectations.

FEDA 77 Strong leadership with a clear vision for the future progress of the college, and clear communication of the vision and the steps which need to be taken to achieve it to all college staff.

Increased use of the latest communication technologies within the college to disseminate information at all levels. Information communication technology eg email is here to stay and ALL staff need to become proficient in the use of it.

FEDA 83 Strong leadership with clear goals communicated effectively to all staff.

FEDA 87 Better communication from the top down.

FEDA 9 Management walkabouts within the college by the Principal and Senior Management Team.

Uncertainty is the greatest inhibitor. Communicate often. please, even when there is little new to say. Reinforce the good things which are happening at every opportunity.

FEDA 90 Better communications between management and support staff. Being able to plan for a future.

Value Staff/Morale

Curiously the FEDA analysis identifies 29 references to 'value staff/morale', whereas I only categorised 10 statements under 'morale'. It is important to state here that I started my analysis and categorisation of the free text responses before receiving the FEDA analysis, and I continued to refine the categories and to re-allocate the codings for many months after receiving the FEDA analysis. Also the FEDA analysis only provides a numerical total for each of its 14 categories without the text itself, therefore I was unable to compare what was included in any one of my categories with the equivalent category.

I used 41 categories, so may well have coded comments that FEDA categorised as 'morale' under another heading eg motivation. I coded many of the responses under more than one category, so if they appear elsewhere in this project I have not included them again, so as to avoid repetition. Instead I produced a separate classification for these multiple coded statements for the purpose of writing up the project, assigning a single prime topic/code to each statement.

A neat example of a multiple-coded statement comes from FEDA 113, which I coded under 'communication, morale and management'.

FEDA 113 Being valued is important to me - thus for SMT to keep staff informed - not to let key changes happen without properly being communicated.

Below are the responses I coded under 'morale' as the prime code.

FEDA 102 Give the staff job security, remove the threat of constant re-organisation and redundancy and improve morale, so this could be noticeable to students who would then find college a more positive place to study.

FEDA 31 Pay levels must be improved.
Morale has to be improved.
The new Principal has to receive full support from all of the staff.

FEDA 46 Improve the morale of an overbeaten staff! Maintaining one's motivation in the current (long term current!) situation is very hard.

FEDA 67 Decisions or answers from managers should be quick and effective. Cut the procrastination. This would cut down on gossip and promote better morale.

FEDA 82 Improve communications (no SMT at present, Principal not visible enough, people don't know what is going on). Nobody feels valued, so morale is low.

People are not accountable for poor performance, so the few who want to do a good job are held back because they are not supported and do most of the work.

FEDA 91 Yes. I would like to know how Principal Y expects this college to succeed when we have the same people in senior management who failed inspection 2 years ago? (four named senior managers) are just as inept now as they were then which is why college staff have no confidence in them. My theory is that Principal Y obviously INTENDS this college to fail so that a merger will be inevitable. He may argue that management were upgraded to a 3 in this last inspection but I don't recall completing another Staff Survey asking if I thought they had improved.

FEDA 112 A large scale attitude change is required to encourage all staff to work as a team.. Morale in this college is lower than it has EVER been and I would like to challenge the Principal to organise another Staff Survey and to publish the results.

Other, uncoded

The FEDA analysis contained a category of 'other', containing 25 responses, which was quite a high proportion of the responses, particularly to the first question where it was the third highest category (11%). I did not want to leave any response uncategorized, but was finally defeated by 9 responses which were either so obscure or individual that I couldn't provide them with a category that made sense to me, but that is not to say that they don't have value. They are voices that should be heard.

FEDA 21 It would be pleasing if this had some effect.
I am overworked and underpaid! Why?

FEDA 23 I am concerned that duration of service has not been recorded on this survey. It would tell a lot.

FEDA 3 Give higher status to staff and student needs.
Isn't it about time we changed the 1980's management style?

FEDA 49 Go forwards not sideways!!
This is not a big enough box.

FEDA 85 Return college to LEA control

FEDA 96 New accommodation
Better services
More higher education courses
Island people need this college.

Chapter 12

Leadership re-visited

'Bread, circuses, and something to worship are all they need,' the senator concluded, regretting in his conscience that there should be a lack of bread'
Isabel Allende in 'The House of Spirits'

This research has led me along many unexpected paths in attempting to uncover the causes of the college's ineffectiveness, and one of them has been the question of the college's leadership. The issue of leadership and its importance in the process of determining effectiveness is examined in chapter four. This chapter arose from the evidence/data gathered from the repertory grid interviews and the FEDA survey, which strongly indicated that leadership is a factor in determining the college's effectiveness. This evidence results from the data analysis of the FEDA survey and the Repertory Grid interviews, and the executive's response to my analysis. By leadership I include the position of Principal and what is termed the Executive, which currently consists of the Director of Finance and Management Services, and the Director of Human Resources. The problem of the college's leaders and managers was raised by many of the stakeholders, particularly staff, in the chapter on the Isle of Wight College in Context, and I expected it to be the usual complaints that articulate members of public sector organisations tend to have. However, three aspects of the research have caused me reluctantly to write this section.

Firstly the FEDA survey's closed questions highlighted the strength of feeling amongst staff that the leadership and management was inadequate, and that these negative views were held by more staff than was the case nationally, with only 23% (nationally 38%)

responding that 'management are effective in making decisions about the organisation, and only 21% (33% nationally) agreeing that 'management see complaints as opportunities for improvement rather than threats'. Secondly the free text responses to the FEDA survey contained so many references to leadership and management.

Examples of these are shown below:

- FEDA 77** Strong leadership with a clear vision for the future progress of the college, and clear communication of the vision and the steps which need to be taken to achieve it to all college staff.
Staff morale is very low, people are unsure about the security of their jobs in the present climate and sense a lack of firm direction for the college. The effort that staff have so far put into trying to improve the college needs to be recognised and encouraged.
- FEDA 83** Strong leadership with clear goals communicated effectively to all staff.
- FEDA 85** Remove all managers from Principal W's time for a fresh start.

It is not just the number of the references, but the heartfelt views that is so powerful.

For example:

- FEDA 19** Management need to ensure that staff are not subject to bullying. The fervour and enthusiasm (or desperation!) of some managers can, at times, change from assertiveness to aggression. This should not be tolerated by anyone.

These issues had also been raised during some of the repertory grid interviews eg Repertory Grid 11 interviewee who claimed that he could only construct 'college Principals on a scale ranging from competent to dreadful'.

Thirdly the Principal and Executive's responses to the research have highlighted what can only be described as inadequate leadership. This surprised me somewhat because whilst the college's recent experience of principals, particularly Principal X was not good, there was a strong desire amongst a few staff to support the new Principal Y, for example

FEDA 98 Since the arrival of Principal Y there is a feeling that we are being informed of the direction the college is heading in and that we are being invited to take part in that journey; this was not the case before his arrival. I therefore feel that if there were regular divisional meetings to advise staff of proposals and ask for input thereto prior to implementation it would increase this improved feeling of togetherness and create a stable cohesive unit all pulling in one direction. At present the inter-fighting between divisions trying to protect what they perceive to be areas owned by them is destructive. We must open up the system to debate and wide input on a college wide view not the fearful blinkered views currently held by some managers who will not let go of anything. I would suggest that a college suggestion box be installed with the contents to go to the Principal and /or Vice Principal only.

FEDA 59 Introduce and enforce accountability for all. I believe Principal Y has the ability to turn this college around and steer it to success, so that ideas do not get stopped by inadequate managers at all levels.

FEDA 80 I would like to see an honest and open culture being developed in this college. It seems that deceit was the option chosen in the past and staff have been misled into believing that decisions were being made in our, and the students, best interests. I hope the Principal will steer a firm ship and encourage his senior management team to follow his example instead of lapsing back into their old ways. Please sort out the anomaly that has arisen whereby staff taken on as Trainer/Demonstrators have ended up teaching up to 30 hours per week for less pay and worst terms and conditions than lecturers.

Therefore the question had to be asked, what has been the role of the college leadership in contributing to its ineffectiveness?

Studies of school effectiveness have identified leadership as one of the characteristics associated with effective schools. The evidence from research in colleges is less comprehensive. It attempts to link leadership with effectiveness in terms of raising student achievement and retention, as these are quantitative measurements made by FEFC inspections. However, 'Inform', FEDA's newsletter, claimed in 1998 that its research project, 'Improving College Effectiveness, is still underway, but some strong messages have already emerged. Top of the list is that effective institutions keep their eye on the ball-the centrality of teaching and learning as the focus of effectiveness and improvement. Leadership and vision and creating a real learning organisation also emerge as common factors behind effectiveness and improvement,'(Inform, 1998). Those performance indicators (retention and achievement) are also used as the main indicators to demonstrate the extent of college improvement.

This importance is also reflected in the FEFC's Chief Inspector's Annual Report from October 1999 (paper 2).

'Effective Principals ensure that standards of student achievement are systematically monitored, the quality of teaching is regularly evaluated and all staff engage in development planning which results in targets for improvement. In the best-managed colleges, responsibilities are clear and communications are effective. The management style is open and the reasons underpinning management decisions are understood. ...it is clear that we do not have a sufficient number of effective principals if the management of one in nine (11%) is unsatisfactory. It is critical for principals to know what is happening in the classrooms, workshops and laboratories within their colleges.

In the absence of ongoing and systematic management of the quality of the college's provision it is all too easy to lose sight of the purpose of education. In these circumstances, the losers are college students, the local community and college staff who are unfairly stigmatised and have their professional careers harmed.'

In other words all the stakeholders suffer in an ineffective college, and poor management of the quality of teaching causes ineffectiveness.

I will complete this short section with a quote from the obituary of Lord Sieff in *The Guardian* (26 February 2001) 'Lord Sieff had a rule that managers must eat in the employees' restaurants and visit their washrooms and lavatories on the principle that if these were not 'good enough for those in charge, they are not good enough for anyone.'

One of the first acts of the present Principal Y following his appointment was to have his office re-decorated, refurbished and to have a new en-suite shower room and toilet built. This has often been commented upon by staff, along with the newly carpeted and decorated senior management corridor, for example:

FEDA 19 Move all the management offices out of the 'A' corridor where they are too remote. Principal and DDs (*Deputy Directors*) should be accessible and be seen to be accessible.

Defining Leadership in Colleges

Leadership can be defined in many different ways depending upon the models, roles and behaviours which are used to describe it (Hallinger and Heck 1998; Leithwood et al.

1999). However, the consensus of writers on leadership in schools and colleges coalesces around two broad themes according to Sawbridge 2001: firstly, leadership as a process of influencing people and events, and as something which can be exercised by people in organisations who do not possess formal authority; secondly, leadership implies followers and involves the achievement of goals or objectives. This latter theme suggests that followers are only followers for the length of time for which they are engaged in the achievement of the task for which they are being led. If leadership is best seen as an exercise in moving an organisation forward, whereas management by contrast is concerned largely with the maintenance of existing structures and systems, where does this place the college's leaders over the time scale of the project? Leaders are generally thought of as people who do the right thing, matching effectiveness as doing the right thing, whereas managers are people who do things right, similar to efficiency. Michael Fullan (1991) draws the following distinction: 'Leadership relates to mission, direction, inspiration. Management involves designing and carrying out plans, getting things done, working effectively with people.' The views of the majority of staff as expressed in the FEDA survey describe a leadership that singularly fails to provide a clear mission, direction or inspiration:

FEDA 107 Return to open management. During the last eight months or so, I've noticed that the communication between management and staff has dwindled, almost to a stop.

When Carl was running the college, he made sure that everybody knew what was happening. We were kept informed of development plans etc and he encouraged input from all staff. I found, as I'm sure others did also, that this style of open management made us all feel valued, that we were part of the master plan to move the college forward. This has now sadly come to an end, and we are back to the them and us syndrome - a step backwards I feel!

FEDA 22

Remove the culture of secrecy from management so that front line staff felt that we were all working toward the same goals and not simply trying to cover our backs.

The increase in numbers of middle managers has done little to improve delivery but has given even more experienced staff an excuse to avoid their teaching responsibilities and therefore increased the workload of those 'doing the business'.

FEDA 27

Remove the 'fear culture' that has developed via management tactics and actions. This may occur where and when staff are challenging decisions made.

Staff are 'heard' but not often listened to.

Staff want to see the Principal more often and not just at meetings. Most staff want the college and new structure to succeed. Lets hope we can all work together to achieve a common good. This needs flexibility by both parties.

FEDA 35

Allow academic staff enough time to do their job effectively, by recognising pressures placed on them in the current paper dominated culture.

Staff across the board need motivating - threat of redundancy and recent restructuring have demotivated staff previously keen to take the college forward. There is a feeling that lecturing staff in particular are blamed for any problems which arise, when actually there is little support available. The college has lost a lot of talent in recent months and this exodus must say something about the culture.

FEDA 79

Remove the tier of management and governors that were and are responsible for:-

- a) the college's financial position
- b) The lack of constructive organisation and direction
- c) lack of quality
- d) lack of customer care and requirements
- e) lack of motivation of all staff leading to low morale
- f) poor reputation with our customers and the general public

The survey should have been carried out prior to the recent change of management and management structure

The continuous changes in direction, the ever increasing pressure to become financially viable with poor management has made us loose sight of our real goal - EDUCATION.

I see our only saving grace as a return to Local Government control.

The description of the leadership models prevalent at the college as described by these quotes indicates their contribution to the college's ineffectiveness. Leadership is commonly thought of as a combination of a set of behaviours, and processes (Hooper and Potter 1997). Writers such as Leithwood et al (1999) have developed models of leadership frequently found in educational organisations. The model that most closely resembles the appropriate leadership style for the college is transformational leadership. This model, according to Leithwood et al (1999), emphasises the importance of leadership behaviours, often characterised as the 'Four Is' (Bass and Aviola 1994):

- Idealised influence – the ability of the leader to gain the trust, respect and support of those being led
- Inspirational motivation – the ability to inspire and focus the attention of individual on the achievement of shared goals, often using imagery and symbols]
- Intellectual stimulation – a culture of challenge and questioning where individuals are constantly encouraged to reassess both ways of working and the values of the organisation including those of the leader
- Individualised consideration – the support that is available to individuals to allow them to develop in order to meet new challenges and goals.

This model emphasises empowerment, with the overriding concern of the leader being to create the right climate and support structures in which individuals can achieve organisational goals. If this is the appropriate model, why has the college leadership failed to achieve it? Partly it is due to the national rift between managers and managed

which has deepened since incorporation in 1993. The professional status and unique characteristics have become unrecognised as staff are reinterpreted as economic assets or liabilities (Bottery, 1992), as a response to the financial pressures encouraged by the movement to market consultants financed by central government funding. Elliott and Hall (1994) maintain that there has been acceleration in the appointment of senior personnel from the business sector to the senior management teams of the colleges. The increasingly business orientation of managers clashes with the pedagogic orientation of the teaching staff, and this is reflected in the views expressed in this research.

This change in leadership style brought about by national changes to the college environment ironically threatens the quality of educational provision that governments seek to enhance. The model of quality assurance, (which is 'effectiveness' in their terms), that has been advocated for FE, whilst stressing customer satisfaction, uses quantitative performance indicators as measures of effectiveness and efficiency (Elliott, 1993). However, as the rift between lecturers and managers/leaders grows, and the psychological contracts are seen to be broken, the staff are less likely to deliver the level of service which is seen as the main determinant of customer satisfaction. My interviews with students elicited positive views about the teaching staff, but one could speculate how long these will remain given the change in working practices and working conditions of teachers.

It could be argued that the last two governments have deliberately imported business models and values into colleges to effect a cultural transformation from education to business, as evidenced by the incorporation of colleges in 1992 and the subsequent

funding regimes. This can be seen at the college with the employment of members of the executive and senior management team from outside the education sector, the use of business rhetoric in communications and the use of non-education sector consultants eg OPTIMA. The ability of the Executive to change what it referred to as the college's culture is severely constrained by the views of staff as expressed in this research. The fear is that the attempt to change the culture will further erode that part of the psychological contract commonly referred to as 'goodwill'. Furthermore, the introduction of business models, as espoused by the last two Principals, which are often an imitation of a 1980s interpretation of Victorian 'scientific management', may ensure short-term financial viability, but will prove inadequate for the true measure of effectiveness, namely the provision of high quality post-compulsory educational experiences.

The importance of leadership in colleges was highlighted by the FEFC's annual report published in November 2000. This claimed that under its criteria one in nine colleges is badly led by senior management teams, with one in seven being poorly governed.

A possible solution to the failure of leadership and management in colleges in general, and the Isle of Wight College in particular, is to embrace the concept of the learning organisation (Senge, 1990). This view holds that organisations, just like individuals, have the capacity to continually learn. Such a learning organisation should be appropriate for a college, and requires a new type of leadership in which the purpose of leadership is to build organisational capacity for learning. Senge's ideas for leadership

have been adapted for an educational context by Fullan (1993), who proposes four aspects of leadership:

- Neither strong unilateral leaders nor leaders as weak followers are appropriate
- The range of leadership skills and behaviours required are increasingly sophisticated
- Leaders should be able to influence and co-ordinate change processes
- Leadership in learning organisations becomes systemic – everyone is able to exercise leadership because of a shared commitment to the achievement of organisational goals

Unfortunately the evidence from this research does not suggest that the college leadership has embraced Senge's precepts. This can be illustrated by the importance of personal example set by the Executive during the process of managing change. As Hooper (2001:19) states,

'the way leaders behave, the manner in which they treat people, their attitude to ethical matters, and their reactions in periods of difficulty are all observed by their followers.'

The evidence presented in this research is of a leadership that in the eyes of its staff fails to set an appropriate personal example.

FEDA 19 Management need to ensure that staff are not subject to bullying. The fervour and enthusiasm (or desperation!) of some managers can, at times, change from assertiveness to aggression. This should not be tolerated by anyone.

FEDA 27 Remove the 'fear culture' that has developed via management tactics and actions. This may occur where and when staff are challenging decisions made.

Staff are 'heard' but not often listened to.

Staff want to see the principal more often and not just at meetings. Most staff want the college and new structure to succeed. Lets hope we can all work together to achieve a common good. This needs flexibility by both parties.

FEDA 45 SMT to become more visible on the 'shop floor', to be more aware of what life is like for students and staff. If we got to know them, in time, we might trust them. At present I can pass a fortnight or more, moving around college without seeing any of JP, CG, JE etc.
Lack of information - definition of roles at all levels, with staff names.
Who are 'the Governing Body'. Why are they a secret?
Principal wants 'flexibility'. He may be flexible, lecturing staff have been so flexible for so long, they are corkscrews! SMT are perceived as very inflexible!!!

FEDA 55 Management walkabouts within the college by the Principal and senior management team.
Uncertainty is the greatest inhibitor. Communicate often, please, even when there is little new to say. Reinforce the good things which are happening at every opportunity.

According to Hooper (2001:25)

'the subsequent commitment to change will depend fundamentally on the judgement of that observation. The key point here is that nobody knows better about the behaviour of a leader than his or her followers. If they are not convinced, they will not follow.'

As Gandhi said 'you must be the change you want to see.' However, this visible presence does not need to be ostentatious, as Lao Tzu a contemporary of Confucius wrote in the Tao Te Ching 25 centuries ago, "the best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects. Hesitant, he does not utter words lightly. When his task is accomplished and his work done, the people all say, 'it happened to us naturally.'"

Like the new England football manager, Sven Goran Eriksson, the great leader's gift is to lead without making his players feel led. In the hands of someone who knows what he is doing, it is a far better method than those ascribed by Lao Tzu to the lesser categories of ruler: the one who is loved, the one who is feared, and the one with whom liberties are taken.

The college's leaders have displayed the characteristics of Argyris's (1985) Model 1, Theory-in-use as set out in Chapter Five, whereby their governing values have suppressed negative feelings, displayed a desire to 'win' disputes, used strategies to control the environment in a way that solely reflects their perspective and advocates courses of action that discourage inquiry. The consequences of this has been the reluctance to engage in this research, support the public testing of its ideas or to accept the validity of alternative points of view.

Postscript

In November 2001 Principal Y resigned. The nature of his leaving and the way it was reported in the local press underlines the problems raised in this chapter and in Chapter 5. The following extract taken from The County Press of 7 December 2001 illustrates this:

'The troubled IW College has parted company with its fourth principal in as many years with the shock departure this week of Y after two years in the hot seat. Y inherited on-going financial problems, necessitating staff redundancies and cutbacks. The college has also failed its Further Education Funding Council

inspection and at re-inspection last March three areas, science, mathematics and quality assurance, were still found to be unsatisfactory.

Since W retired some four years ago, his deputy G has twice temporarily taken the helm and another incumbent, X, was summarily sacked and escorted off the premises. This year G was made redundant.'

Chapter 13

Conclusion and Recommendations

'The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk.' Hegel

1 Introduction

This research has explored the way organisational effectiveness can be interpreted in a college of further education. It has attempted to answer a number of questions, namely:

- What is effectiveness in a college of further education?
- Is the Isle of Wight College an effective organisation?
- If it is not effective, why is that the case, and what can be done to improve it?

In the spirit of action research, I attempted interventions that would improve the college's effectiveness. It was also in the nature of action research to be surprised by the findings of the research, and to allow the methodology to adapt to the interim findings and to form cycles of research.

The data indicated that the college was and is ineffective, and that the ineffectiveness is not just in failing to meet the legitimate needs of the stakeholders, nor is it simply due to differences in perception. Instead the core problems are much deeper and more fundamental. It is not ineffective in the sense that teachers and students have different core constructs. Their repertory grid and small group interviews reveal a common liking of the college and a consistently positive view of the teaching. They also accept that the external image is poor. This research identifies customer perception of the college's service as central in determining the college's effectiveness. It further revealed the vital

role key stakeholders within the college play in the process of achieving effectiveness. However, the core constructs and beliefs of the other stakeholder groups are fundamentally different, hence the differences in perceptions and the inability to change behaviours. This can be seen in the Principal/Executive and staff split, whereby both groups have a very low opinion of the abilities and motives of the other. Another major revelation was the 'Island factor', and how this affected the stakeholders became much more important than I first expected. These fundamental differences and their effects on myself perhaps explain why my interventions in the pure sense of action research ultimately failed.

Underlying much of the research into this singular organisation is the state of the further education sector in general. Perhaps it is impossible to achieve effectiveness when one of the major stakeholders, and the one which provides the greatest proportion of its funding, namely the government, holds it in such low esteem. This is exemplified by the comments made by Chris Woodhead in the Daily Telegraph Guide to Education (2001). The guide manages to cover the country's 400 plus colleges in just three sentences. 'The further education sector has an abysmal record ... half the students drop out or fail their courses, usually because they choose badly or are badly taught ... many of their students enrol because they can think of nothing better to do'. With such ill founded, blanket criticism it is unsurprising that an underlying lack of self-esteem pervades the sector.

Overlying this national negative view is the local leadership's view of the college and its staff. This negative view was combined with reluctance by the leadership to engage with my research and its findings.

2 Leadership

The effect of the college's leadership on its effectiveness became a greater theme in this research than I originally expected, and somewhat to my surprise, this reflects the views of Stephen Grix, the head of the new Ofsted post-compulsory education division, as quoted in *The Guardian* (26 June 2001). 'Principals and heads of department would be judged on leadership qualities and how they were perceived by students rather than their office management skills and more emphasis would be given to lesson observations than paper statistics like student retention'.

3 The Fallacy of Centrality and Sensemaking

Why was the college leadership so reluctant to accept and act upon the findings of my research, and why were they so unwilling to accept their own position as one of the prime causes of the college's ineffectiveness? One possible explanation is the concept of the 'fallacy of centrality' (Westrun 1982). The Principal and members of the Executive see themselves as 'expert' managers, as individuals with a greater knowledge of the organisation than the other members of that organisation. Their isolation and self-belief make it difficult for them to recognise and assimilate the passive, social intelligence about the hidden underlying problems of the college. This intelligence is often hidden from them because there are barriers to reporting the events. The responses

to the free-text questions in the FEDA survey express the amount of fear amongst staff and the distrust and lack of respect for senior managers. Meanwhile the 'expert' senior managers overestimate the likelihood that they would surely know about the phenomenon if it were actually taking place. Thus they exhibit the fallacy of centrality, ie because they didn't know about a particular event, it must not be going on. In this case because they didn't know the reasons for the college's ineffectiveness, or had a comfortable set of reasons that included blaming others whilst excluding their own culpability, they wouldn't accept the findings of my research.

As Westrun (1982:393) writes, 'this fallacy is all the more damaging in that it not only discourages curiosity on the part of the person making it but also frequently creates in him/her an antagonistic stance towards the events in question'. Principal Y and the *Director of Human Resources in their dismissive descriptions of college staff and Islanders often displayed this antagonism in general. One might well conclude that part of the resistance of the executive to the findings of my research was an inability, rather than just an unwillingness, to believe that their own evaluations of the college's ineffectiveness could be seriously in error.*

This fallacy of centrality is probably reinforced by the interlocking routines that senior managers use to protect themselves from the social knowledge, which they see as threatening them. They are tied together in 'nets of collective action' (Czarbuawsk – Joerges 1992:32). The Executive has a shared understanding of their roles in shifting coalitions of interest groups. The senior management's culture with its prevalence of often defensive routines, office locations, generic understandings, and roles enables

personnel to be interchanged, so that the introduction of a new member of senior management recruited from outside the college soon expounds the same views and displays the same prejudices about the college and its staff. Whilst this facilitates co-ordinated action it also imposes an invisible hand on 'sensemaking' (Weick 1995). He observes that 'if we extend Westrun's observations, it is conceivable that heavily networked organisations might find their dense connections an unexpected liability, if this density encourages the fallacy of centrality.'

The conclusion here is that the Executive are discounting my 'news' because they are hearing it late and conclude it cannot be credible, because if it were, they would have heard it sooner.

According to Weick (1995), organisations stay tied together by means of controls in the form of incentives and measures. He suggests that incentives for reporting anomalies, or penalties for non-reporting of ineffectiveness, what Westrun (1982:384) calls 'uncorrected observations and experience', in the eyes of the Executive intensified their feeling of ambiguity in the short run. As the Executive received further reports and data this feeling of ambiguity should have diminished and what Weick refers to, as 'sensibleness' should have become stronger. That this did not occur is fundamental to this investigation.

The Executive consistently refused to make sense of the knowledge presented to them. They have consistently refused to construct a frame of reference that provides a shared generalised point of view with the other stakeholder groups, notably staff and students; a

frame of reference that would interpret the knowledge and stimulate actions for improvement. Consequently they have been unable to provide a strategic framework that is shared by these other stakeholders. This strategic framework, according to Westley (1990:337), 'involves procurement, production, synthesis, manipulation and diffusion of information in such a way as to give meaning, purpose and direction to the organisation'.

4 The Island Factor

Throughout the first cycle of this research I was unwilling to acknowledge the existence of an 'Island factor'. Perhaps I too was also affected by the myth of centrality. As this important factor was not something that I as the 'expert' researcher had anticipated or originally discovered, how could it be so important? At first reluctantly, but eventually with the enthusiasm of a new convert, I realised the centrality of the 'Island factor' in determining the college's effectiveness. This factor affects at least five stakeholder groups, the Principal and Executive, national agencies such as the FEFC, staff, students and the local community.

Principal Y and his senior colleagues along with the FEFC adhere to the myth of the superiority of the 'overner', the Islanders' name for people from the mainland ie 'from over the water'. This myth further claims that Islanders (colloquially known as 'caulkheads'!) in general, and members of the college staff in particular, are inherently of a poorer quality than their mainland equivalents. This often overt discrimination is

illustrated by a story told by a previous governor of the college, who must remain anonymous, who told me the circumstances surrounding the disastrous appointment of X, the last but one Principal.

This governor claimed that not only did X mislead the governors about his past and his references, but also that G (the Vice-Principal and then acting Principal) was not appointed because FEFC support in the form of funding to alleviate the college's financial plight was dependent on the governors appointing an outsider. The inference was that only an outsider could 'sort the college out'. On reflection, the governor thought, 'they (the governors) should have appointed G'.

Another much smaller example of Principal Y's detachment was his unwillingness to make the Island his home. His wife and what he refers to as 'home' remained in Kent, and he just kept a flat on the Island. On 11th October 2001, he admitted to having just spent twelve consecutive days on the Island, 'which is a record for me'. This was two years since he became Principal. What struck me was both the strangeness of the record itself and the fact that he obviously counts the days he spends on the Island without 'escaping' to the mainland, rather like a prisoner counting the days in one of the Island's prisons! In this way his attitude suggests that he is trapped in 'a psychic prison' (Morgan 1997), a metaphor that entraps him along with his isolated executive in a way of looking at the college. They have a psychological dependency on one another and a refusal or inability to engage with the real world, by which I mean the college 'world' as envisioned by the other stakeholder groups, notably the staff. Life inside their senior management corridor 'prison' provides them with familiar, if unpleasant, routines that

appear preferable to the uncertainties of living outside it. Yet paradoxically, The Principal also saw the college as somewhere to escape from (which he duly did, see the postscript to the previous chapter).

These views of the Island, its college and its staff obviously lead to resentment amongst the staff and a cause of the lack of shared personal constructs between them and the Principal, and a lack of Weick's (1995) shared sensemaking.

The effect of the Island Factor on staff is even greater, and exhibits itself in a number of ways. The college is in a monopoly position in some segments of the post-sixteen market, leading to a degree of complacency. There is a view that 'we'll be all right, because they can't close us down, because there's no other college on the Island.' However, this monopoly position has another adverse effect, because ironically within this collective complacency lies an even greater individual fear. As there is no other college on the Island, and commuting to work elsewhere is often impractical, people fear losing their job because they have nowhere else to go. They think the college is secure, but that their position within it is insecure. A complacent institution full of fearful staff does not provide a recipe for effectiveness. This problem is exacerbated by the Principal's objective to bring 'some reality into the college', to challenge this complacency, but without acknowledging the fear factor. The most visible effect of this strategy has been the, admittedly relatively small number of, redundancies. These have increased the feelings of insecurity and fear to a greater extent than would have been the case in mainland colleges where redundant staff can move more easily to other colleges and occupations. Here, I suspect a larger proportion of those made redundant, stay on

the Island, where they are still in contact with the remaining staff and ratchet up the fear factor.

The anecdotal evidence is that there is also less voluntary movement of staff between colleges due to the financial and social costs involved with moving. The more capable and ambitious have to move home for promotion and experience, and once they have gone, they may find it difficult to return. Others find the financial and social cost of moving too much, so they stay in a basic grade, becoming more resentful at the lack of movement, and hence opportunities, above them on the career ladder, or they see those rungs taken by 'overners' for the discriminatory reasons mentioned earlier. Sadly this unwillingness or inability of some poorer managers to move is also apparent, so they remain longer than would be the case in mainland colleges.

The level of dissatisfaction needed to encourage staff to move is relatively high, because the barriers to moving are so much higher; hence the greater number of dissatisfied staff who are both complacent and fearful.

Students and the local community also have mixed feelings about the college. It is very much their local college and they are very protective of its existence and independence, whilst being overly critical of its output, and this can be seen in the repertory grid interviews and the newspaper articles.

The Island factor may be the result of even deeper forces resulting from the central authority's view of the periphery, which are explored in the next section.

The failure of the strategy as espoused by the college's leadership has been a failure to accept the evidence made available, not least that provided by this research; therefore the meaning, purpose and direction have been inappropriate or not accepted by the other stakeholders. The frames of reference, particularly those displayed in the Repertory Grid interviews, are not congruent because of the way in which Principal Y in particular constructs his view of the college so differently from that of the rest of the staff. In the context of 'sensemaking', what is needed is an interpretive process of the knowledge provided, not just by my research but also from other sources, particularly the collective social knowledge of staff and students. This interpretive process is necessary according to Feldman (1989:19) 'for organisational members to understand and to share understanding about such features of the organisation as what it is about, what it does well and poorly, what problems it faces, and how it should resolve them'. My recommendation is for that interpretive process to be implemented, whereby people within the college discover and interpret their own truths, rather than to propose my own resolutions to the problems, which may be no more applicable than the 'solutions implemented' by recent Principals.

5 The Isle of Wight College – on the Periphery

There is a view of the college, held by the FEFC in particular, but also by other central organisations, and by the Principal and college Executive, which results from its position on the periphery. It is viewed from the centre as being on the edge of a pond, and concentric rings of rules, regulations and fashions travel out from the centre to reach this

periphery when they ultimately vanish, and sometimes they don't reach this wide shore at all.

This view of the college, matches the centre-periphery image occurring in archaeology. This is what the Danish archaeologist Klaus Randenborg (1992) refers to as 'an academic mental stereotype', the conceit of the metropolitan that all culture and wisdom emanates from the centre and has to be disseminated to the provinces. I use the archaeological parallel because it is this classical view of the Greco-Roman 'civilised' world that has informed so much of our way of seeing the world, including the world of further education. Just as Victorian historians and archaeologists viewed the Greco-Roman world as one with a civilised core surrounded by barbarians in order to justify their own imperialism and conquest of 'uncivilised' colonies, so does the central power of the FEFC, and its successor the LSC (Learning and Skills Council), view its more distant colleges. Prior to incorporation in 1993, colleges were part of the local government structure and were consequently semi-independent provinces of the imperial central government, with an amount of self worth that has been eroded in recent years. There is a view which is expressed by a number of staff, that mainland colleges contain sources of expertise lacking on the Island, and that all the existing managers should be disposed of.

FEDA 21 Change or remove all of the old senior management.

FEDA 58 Replace the whole senior management team.

FEDA 85 Remove all managers from B Marriott's time for a fresh start.

FEDA 91 Yes. I would like to know how John Parnham expects this college to succeed when we have the same people in senior management who failed inspection 2 years ago? W,X,Y and Z (*author's note, I have removed the actual names of four senior managers used by FEDA 91*) are just as inept now as they were then which is why college staff have no confidence in them. My theory is that Mr Y obviously INTENDS this college to fail so that a merger will be inevitable. He may argue that management were upgraded to a 3 in this last inspection but I don't recall completing another Staff Survey asking if I thought they had improved. Morale in this college is lower than it has EVER been and I would like to challenge the Principal to organise another Staff Survey and to publish the results.

These display a worrying inferiority complex, which is fed by Principal Y's low opinion of 'Islanders'. This is illustrated by the following three quotes taken from public utterances he made during 2001. In a post re-inspection meeting with the whole college he was critical of Islander staff attitudes, warning them that they, 'can't keep blaming mainlanders who don't understand the Island for the poor inspection grades' (8 March 2001). In February he claimed that there were 'some people (*in the college*) who don't have the college's best interests at heart' (3 February 2001). Finally in October he said that lecturers 'were complacent about having light timetables, unlike me when I was a main grade lecturer' (5 October 2001).

This myth of the centre-periphery image needs to be conquered for the college to overcome its inferiority complex.

6 A Way Forward

Managing Organisational Change

If we accept that the College is operating within an increasingly turbulent environment, then the management of change becomes an essential strategic capability. Recent events have also caused great changes within the College, but these internal upheavals do not appear to have taken place with the strategic intention to meet or anticipate the external pressures. Instead they have their own internal logic or rather lack of logic. Before I analyse these internal changes it would be helpful to use Kurt Lewin's (1951) Force Field Analysis to describe the triggers for change, and the resisting and driving forces that either promote or frustrate change within the College.

The triggers or factors influencing change within the College include:

- changes in national educational provision
- increased competition, the growth of new market entrants
- changing leadership, four Principals in three years
- deteriorating financial position
- changing customer profile
- poor college reputation, poor inspection report
- low staff morale
- redundancies
- lack of coherent, widely accepted vision
- curriculum developments

- new learning opportunities
- insular culture

The triggers of change usually fall into one or more of five categories; an organisation's markets (clients or suppliers), Government and regulatory bodies, competitors, the economic climate and technological advances. Once the triggers have been identified there is a need to analyse the relationships between them that may cause interaction. Planning for change and helping people to accept it and not resist change is fundamental to the success of change management in a turbulent environment. This will obviously involve taking the staff with the change, and is particularly vital in a people-based service industry. The success of a change process is therefore the management of people, the avoidance of unnecessary conflict and helping them to accept change. As Mullins (1996) states, the underlying objectives of a change process can be seen in general terms as:

- modifying the behavioural patterns of members of the organisation, and
- improving the ability of the organisation to cope with changes in its environment

Lewin prescribed a three stage planning process to deliver the required change and improve organisational performance. He took a modernist, scientific and positivist approach that presumed that change can be anticipated, planned and delivered. His three-stage process assumes that the world can be improved by positive actions determined by scientific methods. The three stages are Unfreezing, Movement and Re-freezing.

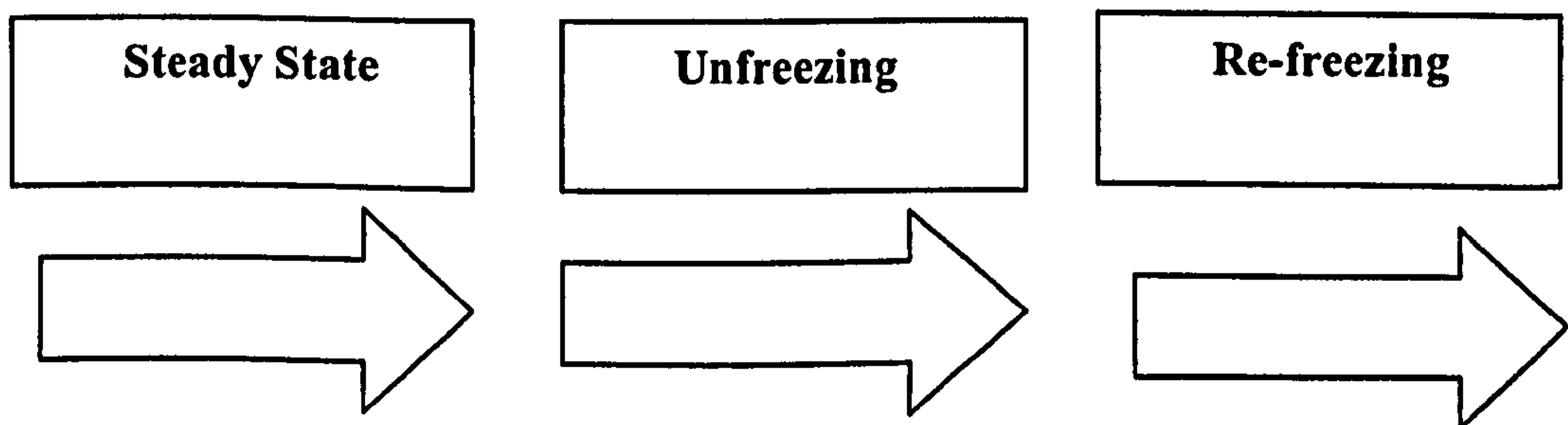
Unfreezing the present state requires the organisation to recognise that change is required, identifying the forces that resist change, which need to be reduced or eliminated, and the driving forces that promote change and can be promoted.

Movement towards the new status quo requires an effective change programme so that new behavioural and, if possible, new attitudes and values can be introduced.

Re-freezing and stabilizing the change process requires the balancing of the resisting and driving forces with the embedding of new ways of working being established and evaluated with appropriate supporting mechanisms in place until the changes become the new status quo Figure 13.1.

Figure 13.1

Lewin's Three Stage Change Process



Many writers have amended Lewin's rational approach, but they all follow a linear sequential pattern, e.g. French, Kast and Rosenzweig (1970) with their eight stage change process:

- initial problem identification
- data gathering
- problem diagnosis
- implementation
- follow-up and stabilization
- assessment
- learning

The drawback to this approach in the College's turbulent state is that it makes some basic assumptions that are not tenable to the College. It assumes that the college is in a state of stable equilibrium at a point of time, i.e. at the start of the process, when this is not the case, and that it can logically move from one state to another. Secondly it assumes that there are forces which either resist change or promote it – these are certainly in place, as is shown by the Force Field Analysis in Figure 13.2. The model further assumes that the forces can be identified and a relative weighting attached to them. This may also be achievable in a generalised quantifiable way. Finally the model relies on the imposition of change from above, and this is where traditional change management approach falls down. It is questionable if the staff will truly embrace the change in these circumstances given the dissonances in values and perceptions held by the different stakeholder groups.

The reality is that the College requires an emergent approach which concentrates on the College becoming a learning organization through the re-framing of its problems, self-determined development, and unfreezing the barriers to learning, rather than unfreezing

a non-existent steady state. At present the College is responding to events. This event-driven reactivity is often too late, as Hegel said “the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk,” that is to say the destructive forces are already in place before any responses are made to them, and by then it is too late. Instead the College should endeavour to become a learning organisation, ie an organisation facilitating the learning of all its members and continuously transforming itself (Pedler, Boydell and Burgoyne, 1988). They emphasise that what is important is how things are done, not what is done. It is equipping people to deal with the uncertainty and ambiguity of turbulent change, tolerating the co-existence of contradictions and opposing views, working with others in co-learner communities and creating an appropriate balance between reflection and action. Merely adapting to a changing environment is not enough, instead the College needs to encourage ‘generative’ learning, requiring new ways of looking at the world, whether in understanding our customers or in understanding how better to manage the College. In a learning organization there is less need for the charismatic leader who in times of crisis deals with the short-term events. Instead leaders need to be designers, teachers and stewards; concepts which should be second nature to leaders of a college! The skills required include the ability to build a shared vision, to bring to the surface and challenge the prevailing mental models, and to foster more systematic patterns of thinking. The prevailing mental models, as revealed by the repertory grid interviews and the FEDA free text responses, are identified as a major resistor to change in the Force Field Analysis (Figure 13.2). The aim is to build a College where people are continually expanding their capabilities to shape the future.

The distinction between adaptive and generative learning is a development of Argyris and Schon's (1978) distinction between "single-loop" learning, in which individuals or groups adjust their behaviour in response to fixed goals, norms and assumptions, and what they refer to as "double-loop" learning, in which the goals, norms and underlying assumptions themselves, as well as behaviour, are challenged and open to change. This existing single-loop behaviour can be summarised as financial problems leading to insecurity followed by cost-cutting job-losses, poor external image and internal despair that discourages enrolment resulting in an even worse financial position. The only management responses to this destructive cycle consist of threats and exhortations. Sadly these only reinforce the feeling of insecurity and the other negative stages in the cycle.

It is easy to understand how the College in times of crisis looks towards appointing leaders as heroes, great men or women who will have the charisma to set the direction, make the key decisions and energize the staff. This understandable, if probably unnecessary, view was turned into a negative by the FEFC's presumption that a mainlander was needed to bring *these special* leadership attributes. However, leadership in a learning organization requires a subtler and ultimately more radical approach. It starts with the principle of creative tension, which according to Fritz (1990) comes from seeing clearly where we want to be, our "vision", and telling the truth about where we are, our "current reality". The gap between the two generates a natural tension. This gap needs to be resolved either by raising the level of current reality, or by lowering the vision. The gap in the College appears to be particularly wide, exemplified by the poor Inspection Report illustrating the current reality and the Governors espousal of a number

of “centres of excellence” within the College as an attainable vision. What is required is a better understanding of our current reality and a more realistic vision. An analysis of our current reality is insufficient in itself, neither is the mere espousal of a compelling picture of a desired future enough. The present poor analysis of current reality and an overblown vision, with new mission statements logos and strategic plans, only creates cynicism.

The College, once it has accurately described the current reality and developed a shared and attainable vision, can generate a creative tension whereby the energy for change comes from within all staff as they strive to achieve that vision. At present we are only problem-solving in reaction to problems becoming so great that we are forced to change; and as the problem is solved, a collective sigh of relief goes up, until the next crisis occurs. Meanwhile no real change takes place.

The traditional image of a leader as a charismatic leader is clearly inadequate for a learning organization. Leadership is intertwined with culture formation (Schien 1985), and building an organization’s culture and shaping its evolution is a unique and essential function of leadership. In a learning organization the roles of the leader as designer, teacher and steward become even more important.

It could be said that the leader as designer needs to alter the social architecture of the college. It does not involve the altering of lines and boxes in an organizational structure, as has been the case in the College’s three re-structurings in three years. It should start with the governing ideas of purpose, vision and core values. To be effective

and successful the college needs to realize what other successful organizations know, namely that:

- service to customers comes first
- service to its employees and management comes second
- service to its stockholders, last

Our failure to realize this is typified by an analysis of car parking allocations at the College. This shows a complete reversal of the desired state. Parking is an important contributor to the attractiveness of a college to potential students, but the allocation of parking spaces at the college displays a perverse acceptance of the ranking of stakeholders. Reserved parking spaces closest to the College are allocated on the basis of seniority, length of employment and 'relationships' to senior managers, so that governors as representatives of the College's equivalents to stockholders have the prime parking spaces alongside senior managers and the Principal's secretary; the next group of spaces is allocated to other managers, long-serving support staff and teaching staff; at a distance from the main buildings is the unreserved car park for the majority of staff; and at the furthest remove the student car park. Whilst car parking appears to be a relatively minor consideration, it is symptomatic of the prevailing College culture.

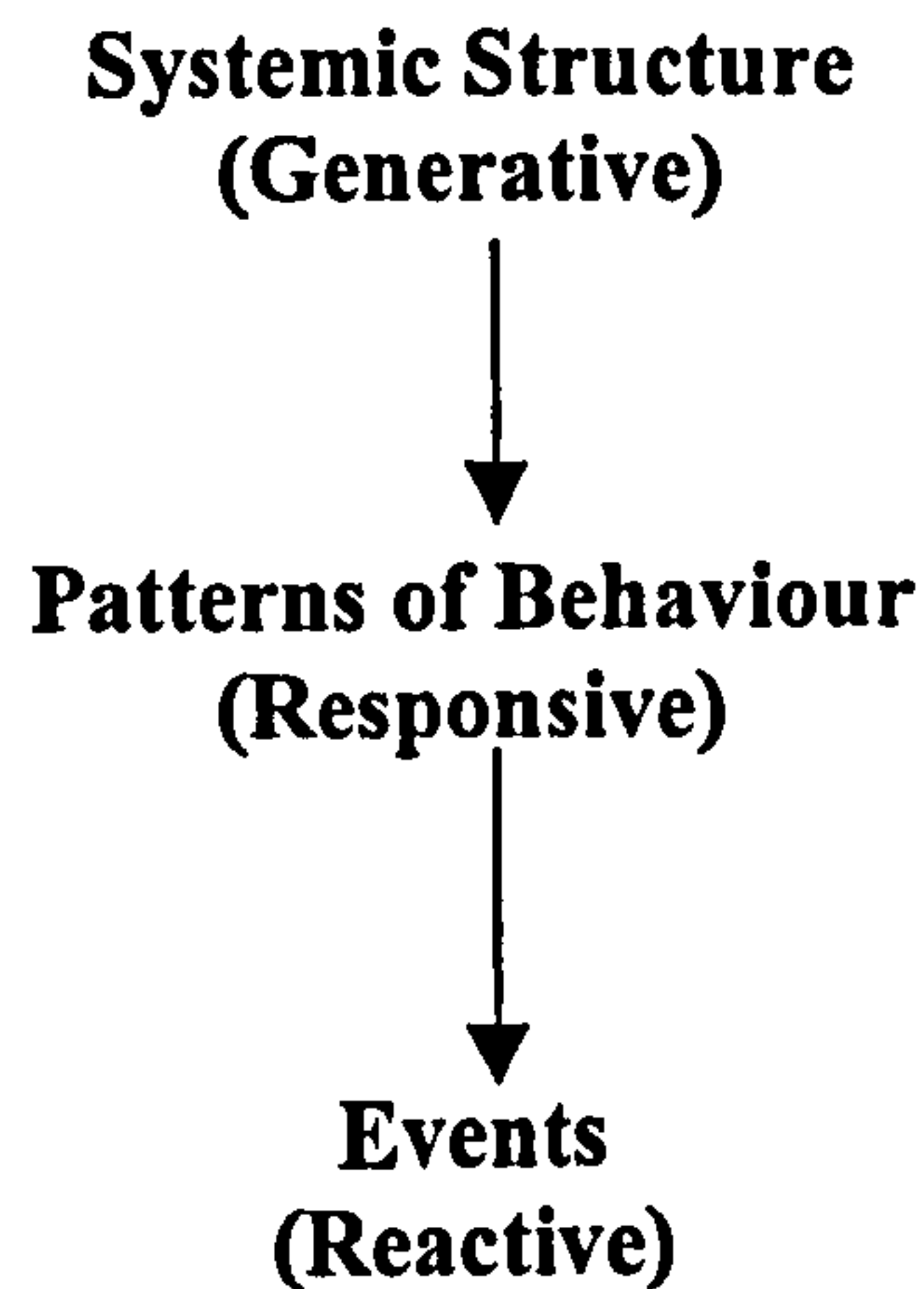
If the leader needs to be a designer in a learning organization then the development of policy should be as Mintzberg (1987) proposes, "an emergent phenomenon". He argues that successful organizations "craft strategy", as they continually learn about the changing environment and balance what is desired and what is possible. The key is not

getting the right strategy but fostering strategic thinking. However, strategy development and implementation in the College follows the traditional route of being the preserve of a small number of senior managers and governors.

The second leadership role of the leader as teacher requires the leader to help people to achieve more accurate, more insightful and more empowering views of reality, rather than providing the 'correct' view of reality. In a learning organization, this teaching role is developed further by paying attention to people's mental models and by the influence of the stakeholders' perspective. These mental models need to be surfaced to ascertain how people really view the organization. A major part of my research consisted of using Repertory Grid Analysis and Personal Construct Theory to discover people's mental models of the organization. They are vital to discern, because the assumptions and perceptions of how the world works have a significant influence on how people perceive problems and opportunities, identify courses of action and make choices (Kelly 1970).

One reason why mental models are so deeply entrenched is that they are largely tacit. Mental models go beyond revealing people's hidden assumptions. Usually 'reality' is explicitly described as pressures that must be borne, crises that must be overcome and limitations that must be either overcome or merely accepted. Leaders as teachers help people to restructure their views of reality to see beyond the superficial conditions in which the College operates and the obvious environmental events, and engage with the underlying causes of the College's problems, and therefore identify new possibilities for shaping the future. Senge (1994) identifies three distinct levels, shown below, at which

leaders can influence people to view reality, “events, patterns of behaviour, and systemic structure”.



The third role for a leader is leader as steward, which is a particularly subtle role of leadership (Senge 1984). Unlike the roles of designer and teacher, it is almost solely a matter of attitude. It is an attitude critical to learning organizations. The ideal is for the *leader to act as a steward*, where steward means a servant. Greenleaf (1977) argues that

“The servant leader is servant first.... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. This conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power driver or to acquire material possessions”.

There are two levels to this role; firstly stewardship for the people they serve, and secondly stewardship for the larger purposes or mission that underly the enterprise. My

reflections on the present College leadership do not suggest that this role is being actively pursued.

In order to be successful the College should endeavour to surface and test the prevailing mental models. My purpose as Head of Human Resource Development was to support such an endeavour. In the event, the principal and the executive's refusal to engage with my research findings frustrated this purpose. Many of the best ideas in an organization never get put into practice because new insights and initiatives often conflict with established mental models, and I took it as my role to identify these mental models and disseminate them to interested parties and decision makers within the College. Our leaders must challenge the prevailing assumptions without invoking defensiveness; no easy task during a time of crisis exemplified by the thirty plus announced redundancies. These challenges require a combination of reflection and enquiry skills. Again these are difficult to exhibit when reacting to short-term pressures reflects the prevailing management style. Argyris and Schon (1978) distinguish "espoused theory" from "theory in use", whereby people like to think they hold certain "acceptable" views, their "espoused theories", but where their actions reveal deeper, often contradictory views, i.e. their deeper mental models or "theory in use". One noticeable example I have discovered is in colleagues who espouse the excellence of the College as an institution for students, yet send their own children to the local school sixth forms. Recognising and defusing defensive routines is important. Argyris and Schon (1978) refer to these "defensive routines," as entrenched habits used to protect ourselves from embarrassment and threats.

Figure 13.2

Force Field Analysis (after Lewin)

DRIVING FORCES

New Principal
New Governors
External Agencies
Exogenous shocks
Ambition
Financial position
Legislation



RESISTING FORCES

Culture and habit
Resources, particularly buildings
Self interest
Lack of trust
Low morale
Personal insecurity
Vested interests

This Force Field Analysis is the synthesis of my own analysis and fields drawn up by two colleagues who are both conversant with the technique. It is particularly interesting to see the almost identical listings of driving forces and resisting forces drawn up independently by the three of us. I have not attempted to evaluate or rank the relative strength of these forces using the classic Lewin approach. Suffice to say that we all agreed that the driving forces were external to most of the College staff, whilst of the resisting forces the strongest was the prevailing College culture and its associated manifestations.

7 Reflections on the Research

The conclusions are much darker than I first envisaged, for when I started this research I was optimistic about its outcome, expecting to make this part of my world a better place. I also had a clear plan about the research in terms of where I expected the research to lead, but the reality was much different. At times the research and the data gathered was a deeply depressing experience and often left me sadder. However, I still found it richly rewarding and believe that I uncovered some fundamental truths about the college, which would help others to improve the organisation, despite the unwillingness of the Principal and Executive to accept or act upon this knowledge. It did show that action research by itself “couldn’t drive change”. It was only able to open people’s eyes and challenge the prevailing orthodoxies. I also mostly enjoyed the research process. I particularly enjoyed the repertory grid interviews, which I found to be an immensely powerful research technique. I also found it rewarding, if a little disconcerting, to explore and utilise grounded theory and ethnography. The use of these and other methods of qualitative research can be judged according to Hammersley (1998) by the criteria of validity and relevance. I would claim that the research is valid because it provides an accurate representation of my version of reality, and I would further claim that it is plausible, credible and central to a certain truth. It is relevant because the research topic and the findings contribute to our knowledge of both organisational *effectiveness*, specifically in a college of further education, and of the limits to action research.

In addition to discovering truths about the college which may illuminate research into the effectiveness of other organisations, I believe that I have discovered something new about the process of action research, namely that without shared core constructs between the researcher and those able to effect the required changes, the interventions required by classical action research becomes impossible. Instead like politics, the 'action' in the research is reduced to achieving the art of the possible.

Reflecting upon the effect of studying for a DBA on myself and conversely the effect of my personality upon the research is quite difficult, and in one sense unnecessary, because all the research and this final thesis is grounded in my own self. In the early stages of the research I found it much more messy than I anticipated. My clear plan soon fell apart, and at one time I was just desperate to produce something, anything, yet in the end gained great satisfaction from producing something which is potentially much more interesting and ambitious than I first intended. At times the journey was one into my own personal constructs and beliefs; a meditation on the place, which is the college and the Island, or perhaps it is not a physical place at all, but a zone of my inner geography that is unreachable by the reader. It may be a text that shivers on the verge of non-existence, its only just there, and is so qualitative it lacks meaning or use to anyone else. At other times in a more positive mood I celebrated its messiness and the nuggets of gold that glinted in the detritus of the endless data.

Whilst I have been critical of the Principal and the Executive, it may have been sadness at my own inadequacy to force through the degree of interventions that I had hoped for. It could simply have been because I was born in the year of the rabbit, and according to

Chinese astrology (Tan, 1998) I am supposedly 'sensitive, with tendencies toward being thin-skinned and skittery at the first sign of criticism'.

Research for a DBA in unsupportive circumstances with little or no response from the College's Executive had some important effects on my career. It made me re-evaluate my own position and working relationships. I also used the Enquire Within software to draw up my own repertory grids of general preferred career and specific management activity within the college. As a consequence I have started to look for a job elsewhere, whilst changing my present management role to distance myself a little from the senior managers and thus to achieve a degree of separation from them. Although I am designated a senior manager I am not part of the management team, if indeed there is anything approaching a team, and the truths revealed by this research make my relationship with the Principal and Executive even more difficult. A greater understanding of the organisation has not necessarily improved my own effectiveness as a manager, let alone improved my professional well-being or happiness.

8 And Finally ...

A continuing cause of effectiveness from an analysis of the most effective schools, and colleges (where the evidence is more scarce), suggests that they all have 'strong connectiveness' ie the stakeholder groups share an underlying belief system, have a common purpose and work together in strong and flexible teams which display self-esteem and mutual respect. At the Isle of Wight College this strong connectiveness would initially require the major stakeholder groups-Principal and Executive, other

managers, students, support staff, local community, government agencies-working together with a greater understanding and acceptance of each other's underlying personal constructs and psychological contracts.

One remaining aspect of action research not revealed by the literature is clear advice on when to stop. The iterative process exploring living events in real time never reaches an obvious conclusion. So I think I will just....

Whitehall names and shames IW College

0814/5/99

THE WAY the IW College has been run, its results and the neglect of its facilities in the pursuit of a new complex, have been highlighted by a highly-critical education inspectorate report.

Days later, as a result of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) findings, the Department for Education and Employment "named and shamed" the college as one of only four throughout the country as having serious weaknesses that needed to be urgently addressed, although it stopped short of branding it as failing.

The department has asked the college to produce a rigorous and costed action plan within a month and could provide funding for an outside consultant to be drafted-in to help.

Present governors and the past management of the IW College were sternly criticised in the detailed FEFC report by inspectors which marks the college in six of 11 key areas as "making less than satisfactory provision — in which weaknesses clearly outweigh strengths".

Science, maths and computing, engineering; general resources; quality assurance; governance and management were all ranked below average. Business, hospitality and catering, health and care courses and its basic education and support for students were all judged to be average.

The report comes less than a month after

By RICHARD WRIGHT

Dr Michael Taylor, college principal for just eight months, had his contract of employment terminated by mutual consent

But the college this week hit back at inspectors. Ray Wheeler, chairman of governors for eight years, accused the report's authors of not doing their homework, basing it on inaccurate and slanted information, moving the goalposts since the inspection of three years before and penalising the college for its honesty.

He said the inspection team had completely ignored a four-page report he presented to them in which he detailed the progress of an action plan put in place to address weaknesses already identified by the college.

The college said some previously model establishments had fallen foul of the more rigid inspection process.

The report, by the inspectorate of the FEFC, recognised that governors were loyal and had thoroughly examined their role, but had:

- Failed to provide adequate strategic direction for the college.
- Carried out poor monitoring of college performance and the lack of targets.
- Given insufficiently rigorous consideration to financial matters.
- Had a reactive approach to strategic planning.
- Shown inadequate concern for the quality of the curriculum and poor attention to the monitoring and review of key policies.

The report was compiled after an on-the-spot inspection in February after the college had made its own self-assessment four months before.

It agrees with many of the strengths and



The IW College, subject of highly critical report by inspectors.

weaknesses in management identified by the college and says some improvements were being produced. But it highlights:

- Weak financial management.
- A poor financial position.
- The legacy of failure to address key strategic issues.
- The absence of a middle management structure.
- Inefficiencies in class sizes and course hours.
- Poorly-managed budget preparation and allocation.
- Little development of equal opportunities or health and safety management.

The report accuses the college, under former principal Bryan Marriott, of neglecting the present complex in the pursuit of permission for a new college.

"The pursuit of planning permission to build on a fresh site has consumed much time and money, resulting in a prolonged neglect of the fabric of the present buildings, their maintenance and re-decoration," it said.

"Structural shortcomings have worsened. The state of mobile classrooms makes them unacceptable as learning environments.

"The self assessment report acknowledged significant weaknesses but underestimates the extent and seriousness of the problems.

"Some essential work has been undertaken recently to comply with health and safety regulations, but much remains to be done."

It pointed to the fact that the college condition survey and maintenance plan it commissioned in 1997 had resulted in work "barely starting" because of the continued expectation of a new building.

● Cont. on page 4.

Talk on IW College scheme deemed inappropriate

A PLANNED talk on the important link between skills training and the IW's economy fell foul of a basic shortcoming — poor communication.

The IW Partnership and the IW College had been asked to address the issue in a joint presentation to the council's economic development, tourism and leisure services select committee last week.

But as soon as it emerged the college had instead pre-

pared its input on the importance of developing its Newport site, principal John Parnham was told his discourse was not appropriate.

Director of development David Jaggar said that because some select committee members also served on the planning committee, they could be laying themselves open to criticism if they heard his case for redevelopment of the college site.

And because the content of his speech was only discovered

shortly before the meeting, Mr Parnham said he had not time to prepare the address the committee was expecting.

Mr Jaggar said he had no idea how Mr Parnham had come to believe he was being invited to address the development issue.

IW Partnership managing director David Main was left to go solo in stressing the importance of a thriving college to the Island economy.

"We cannot afford to have a college at risk when we are getting back on track in economic terms and desperately need better qualified labour to fill the modern jobs that require a higher degree of skills," Mr Main said.

"A successful college is absolutely essential as it is the primary supplier of vocationally-trained labour."

Mr Main said college heads were "busting a gut" to get the college back on track and he urged councillors to give them every assistance they could.

"Unless we get a good college, we cannot fulfil our economic strategy.

"I make a plea to members to find all the ways we can to help the college emerge from this sad period it has gone through and to become a beacon of excellence," said Mr Main.

CP17/11/00

IW College makes its deputy chief redundant

THE IW College has this week confirmed that it has made vice-principal Carl Groves redundant.

A short statement issued on behalf of the principal's office said Mr Groves would be leaving the college on January 31.

It added: "Responsible for supervision of strategy and quality, Carl's contribution to the college has been substantial in the early stages of the robust restructuring which is under way.

"The role of the vice-principal is now redundant; this work has been integrated into the tasks of other senior staff in order to put strategy and quality at the centre of every senior appointment."

College principal John Parnham added: "Carl has played a valuable part in the history of the college, but we are subject to ever-greater budgetary pressures and, regrettably, redundancies at all levels of seniority have become a fact of college life here and throughout the UK."

The IW College currently has a deficit of £800,000 and further redundancies are possible.

CP19/11/01

Mystery of college management job cuts

THE IW College this week declined to comment on rumours that one of its top management team is to be made redundant.

And speaking from his home, deputy principal Carl Groves, who stepped in to run the college for several months after the departure of Dr Michael Taylor in March, 1999, also declined to make any comment.

"I cannot confirm or deny whether or not I am being made redundant. I am still working at the college but I can't say more than that," said Mr Groves, 43.

After being asked if the rumour of redundancy referred to the principal, John Parnham, or his deputy, Mr Groves, the college, which faces a total deficit of £800,000, issued a state-

ment.

"John Parnham, college principal, is currently on a business visit to China and Japan promoting the college teaching to overseas markets.

"He will return to his duties as principal later in the month."

The spokesman, however, declined to make any comment on whether or not Mr Groves would be leaving.

In September management admitted that their accounts were adrift to the tune of £660,000 because of inaccurate forecasting.

This figure represents around ten per cent of the college income and at the time it was said that if all the losses were to be made up by staff cuts, it could mean up to 30 jobs would go.

CP15/11/01

People in the news

A FORMER Ventnor woman has become one of the top five nannies in the prestigious Hampshire Nanny of the Year 2000.

Julia Remnant, 32, (left) who moved to Basingstoke in 1988 to take up her first position as a nanny, was nominated for the top care award — beating off competition from 40 other hopefuls.



CONTRIBUTED

At a special awards ceremony held in Winchester, Julia received a certificate of commendation and a £25 Debenhams voucher from BBC South personality Sally Taylor.

Julia, who achieved the Nursery Nurse Examination Board (NNEB) qualification at the IW College in 1988, also attended Ventnor Middle School and Sandown High School.

CP 19/11/01

S



Fiona Baird.

CP 17/11/00

SPENDING the winter in Australia is the next move for Islander Fiona Baird, now that she has graduated with a BSc honours degree in agriculture from Harper Adams University College in Shropshire.

Fiona, of Bowcombe Farm at Carisbrooke, sets off shortly and plans to return in February. The ex-Carisbrooke High and IW College student has been working as a co-ordinator with Group Cereals Limited.

Students campaign for grants not loans

ISLAND students have joined the campaign to turn loans into grants.

They were taking part in the national rally on Wednesday and coupled that with an appeal to Island MP Dr Peter Brand to raise the issue in parliament.

Steven Dixon, vice-president of the IW College Student Association said: "Previous generations have had the opportunity to receive grants and been subsidised in higher education. My generation has been robbed of this right.

"Many young people are not able to enter higher education due to the crippling amounts of money required and would be unable to pay back their student loans. This is making higher education an elitist movement which the average person is finding it harder and harder to enter.

"There are many intelligent young people on the Island who wish to go to university who have worked very hard and deserve some help when it comes to their education."

CP 17/11/00

Lecturers give first-class tuition

From Scott Fisher (on behalf of General Catering Students, Year 3 Food and Hospitality Section),
4 Mountfield, Tennyson Road,
Yarmouth:

AS A GROUP of students who are currently completing a third year at the IW College in the food and hospitality section we feel the need to put forward some positive points regarding how we as students view our course of study.

Far from being one of the "four worst colleges in the country" the catering division has recently been awarded third place of 45 colleges for the students' standard of work, presentation and overall

performance from Gardner Merchant Leisure (one of the biggest catering companies nationally) while being engaged at very prestigious events, which include: royal palaces, Royal Ascot, Chelsea Flower Show, etc. etc.

Being placed second from a total of 100 colleges who participated, in a national competition run by Nestle (the largest food service company in the UK) part of our prize was a one-week working trip to Switzerland with the Compass Catering Company British Team at an international competition, assisting in the preparation of their dishes.

As recently published in your paper in an article about the food and hospitality section, our public restaurant is on Sundays alone fully booked six weeks in

advance, with lunches and dinners throughout the college year, extremely busy — a statement from the Island's residents of the quality and standard set by the lecturing staff and us.

Our lecturers provide us with the knowledge required to complete the qualifications in a very enthusiastic and enjoyable way, giving first class tuition and support.

On completion of our course, job opportunities are always here; this in part is due to the food and hospitality sections' reputation both locally and nationally, within the industry.

We will be completing our studies in July this year and will look back at our time in college with a sense of satisfaction and achievement.

Adult education service meets public's needs

From Diane Gould.

Adult education co-ordinator,
IW College, Medina Way, Newport:

I WAS incensed to read Cllr Barton's comments in last week's CP relating to adult education, but understand that he has now apologised for these comments.

I would like to explain more about how the adult education service operates.

From the total LEA education budget 0.09 percent is provided to run the adult education service. This represents £62,000 of which £46,000 is actually given to the college.

Last year 3,167 students attended courses at the college and at venues

throughout the Island. The contribution from the LEA to the college covers non-vocational courses only, leisure courses.

Did Cllr Barton not read the report that went to education committee and which appeared in the CP "Adult Education Gets Top Marks"? An Ofsted-type inspection was undertaken and the results showed high retention

rates of approximately 85 per cent and courses being attended by large numbers of students (approximately 12/16 students per course), with over 300 courses on offer.

As far as Cllr Barton's comment "I do not think adult education is relevant to the needs of the people of the IW", perhaps he would like to come to the Adult Education Office and look at all the evaluation forms received from students to see how wrong he is with this statement.

Every year we try to put on new subjects and find new venues and the praise we receive from the public proves we are meeting their needs.

College vital to economic future

From Cllr M. Barton.

20 Rosetta Drive, East Cowes:

AFTER reading your article about the IW College and comments attributed to me I felt a few words of explanation would be in order.

Yes, I am unhappy at what has happened at the college and I am very sorry that all the years of fine work by the present chairman have ended in the sort of recriminations that have recently hit the headlines.

Yes, I should have known better than to have been so forthright, I am probably out of practise and allowed the CP to catch me unaware.

Can I make it clear that the performance of the majority of the people involved in the college during my years as leader was in no way flawed, I think the college lost its way recently, much of the reason for this being the lack of a local decision on the future of the building and the need to get outside funding.

Over a long period I have striven to promote

the college, both my daughters received an excellent education there and I have in the past served on the governing body.

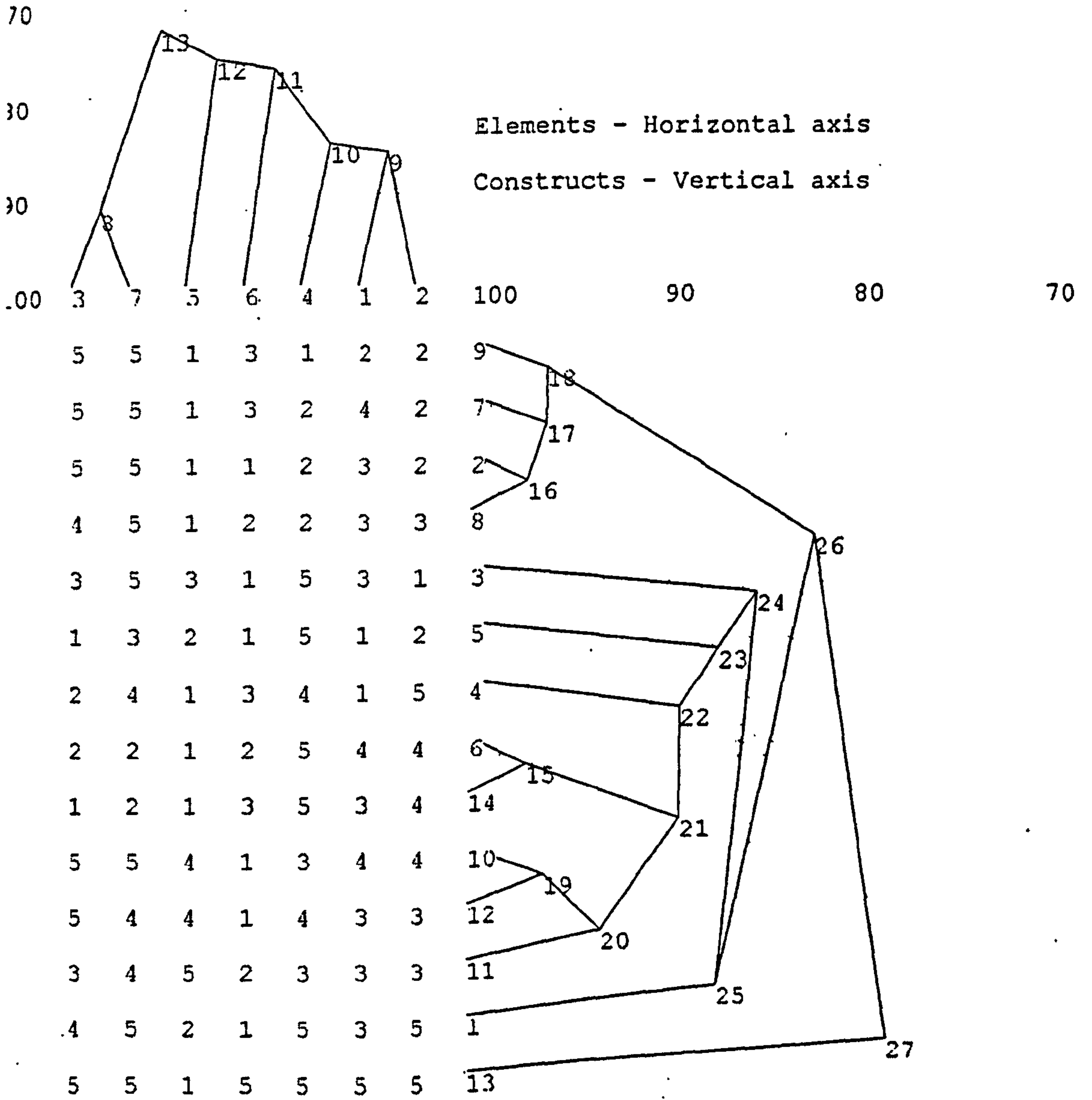
My main concern has been the increasing detachment of the college from the mainstream education system on the IW. The discussion at the education meeting was about specific courses in adult and further education and the needs of industry and commerce seemingly being unfilled, a fact borne out by a number of Island employers I have spoken to.

I have offered the acting principal, Carl Groves an apology for the way in which my remarks were reported and asked him to pass this on to governors and staff. Now is the time to support the college because it is vital to our economic future and we need to help it to refurbish and expand through sensible decisions of all the agencies involved.

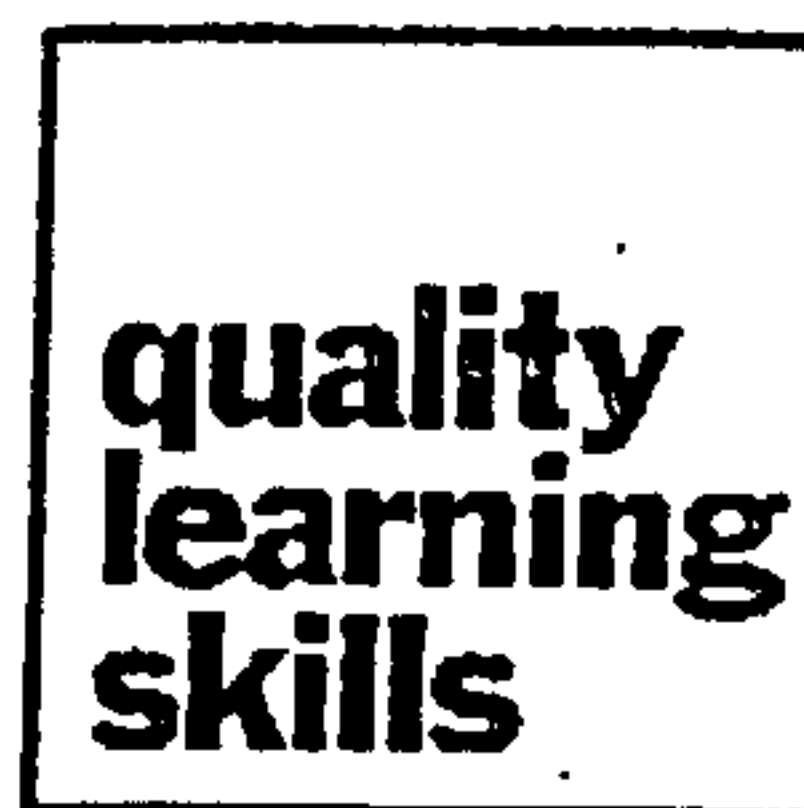
We are happy that the comments made by Cllr Barton were reported accurately — Editor.

Appendix 3 Repertory grid correlation tree

ENQUIRE WITHIN - C:\ENQUIREW\DBA1.SES



Staff Survey



Dear Colleague

Please take some time to complete this questionnaire on your feelings about the College.

Though I understand that surveys can be time consuming, but this should not take very long. Getting good feedback is important for the successful management of the College and so it is important that as many staff as possible take part.

The survey is anonymous and the results will be analysed by FEDDA (Further Education Development Agency) but please ensure that you complete the section on age, gender, ethnicity and job type to help them with their analysis of the wider picture. No individual will be identifiable in any level of analysis undertaken.

The survey results will be reported back to staff and the College's management team will be developing strategies in response to the results.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided.

Thank you for your time.

Regards

Principal

Instructions

Below, and opposite, you will find a list of statements together with two, four-point, rating scales.

On the left hand side of each statement please mark one box (like this) to show how important the statement is to you.

On the right hand side of each statement please mark one box to show your level of agreement with the statement.

Very unimportant		Very important			Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	<i>Me</i>	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel valued in <i>this organisation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand my role and the contribution I am making to the goals of the college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	My views are sought and considered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel I have job security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	There is an opportunity for me to progress within the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	My manager gives me the support I need to do my job effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have the authority to do a good job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I get sufficient training to do my job effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I get feedback from my manager on the work I do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I would recommend the college as a good place to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am <u>not</u> thinking of leaving the college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
				Staff				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff work well together in teams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff views are sought and considered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff are involved in planning improvements and setting targets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic and support staff have shared goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff know what they are expected to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff know how well they are performing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff receive appropriate training to make them effective in their job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff feel they have job security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff are committed to improving the quality of all aspects of the college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Very
unimportant 1 2 3 4
Very
important

Strongly
Disagree 1 2 3 4
Strongly
Agree

Management style

Staff are not afraid to say what they really think

Staff are encouraged to take risks or try new things without fear of failure

Management see complaints as opportunities for improvement rather than as threats

Management are effective in making decisions about the organisation

Communication

Communication is effective in the college

Information about strategic and operational goals and performance are communicated effectively

Information about the college is readily available

Staff are given the information they need to do their job effectively

Customers

The college encourages feedback from all its customers

Complaints are dealt with effectively within the college

College

The college has a reputation for the quality of its provision

The college has a good future

Education is central to the management strategy of the college

Adequate resources are provided by the college for staff

Staff workspaces are adequate

Adequate resources are provided by the college for students

Equal opportunities are embedded into the culture of the college

The college genuinely cares about the welfare of its staff



If there were to be ONE action to be taken that would improve the culture of the College, what would it be?

Is there anything else you would like to raise?

How old are you? Under 30 31 - 40 41 - 50 51 or over Are you: Male Female

Would you describe yourself as:

Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other or mixed origins	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate in which of the following categories you are employed:

Part-time academic staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Part-time support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Full-time academic staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Full-time support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Head of School	<input type="checkbox"/>	Head of Department	<input type="checkbox"/>
SMT	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Appendix 5

Focus Group Interviews

The Student Group Interviews

The first focus group took place at an early stage of the research (9 June 1999). The group selected was a class of eight part-time students nearing the end of their first year. The group was comprised of seven males and one female in the age range 26 to 47.

They were divided into two groups of four, and each group was asked to discuss four aspects of the college's effectiveness:

- Factors which have enhanced the college's effectiveness
- Factors which could enhance the college's effectiveness
- Factors which have detracted from the college's effectiveness
- Factors which could detract from the college's effectiveness

The groups were then asked to write their deliberations on 'post it' lists on the wall and to consider the other group's list before meeting as a whole group to produce definitive lists under the four aspects.

I assured the participants of the confidentiality of the research and withdrew from the room during their discussions. The combined group's lists were as follows:

Factors which have enhanced the college's effectiveness

- A strong leader
- More higher education and professional courses
- Stronger links with industry

Factors which could enhance the college's effectiveness

- A more credible image
- Increased dynamism
- More effective lecturers
- Improved library/IT facilities

Factors which have detracted from the college's effectiveness

- *Poor information*
- Examinations
- Support when examinations have failed
- Poor feedback
- Buildings/facilities
- Equipment
- Refectory

Factors which could detract from the college's effectiveness

- Lack of leadership
- Poor financing
- Poor image
- Poor facilities

My initial reflection of this group interview was one of disappointment as during the subsequent general discussion of the issues, it became apparent that one participant was using the discussion as an opportunity to provide justification for an examination failure. This concern with the negative aspects of one individual's disappointment was gradually over-ridden by the whole group discussing the wider aspects of the college's effectiveness.

The second group interview was with another group of mature part-time students. The interview took place on 16 June 1999, and the group consisted of 10 participants (8 female and 2 male). Once again they were divided into two groups and asked to use the 'post its' technique, whilst I left the room, but this time I reformulated the discussion topics as just two questions, which are shown below with the combined group's final deliberations:

What detracts from the college's effectiveness?

- Lack of examination preparation – in general and in specific subjects
- Timing of assignments – not to have them due in when examinations occur
- Room temperature, acoustics, external noise
- Book lists – not all the books are stocked in the library. Books taken out by other groups.
- Lecturers – variable quality

What could improve the college's effectiveness?

- Better feedback when assignments are returned
- Better catering facilities
- More tips on examination techniques
- Improved assignment timetable
- Improved accommodation

These issues were very course specific, and in many ways similar to those produced by the first group. They highlight the need to get the basics right when delivering a service to consumers.

The third group of students consisted of 47 full-time higher education students who were interviewed during their first induction week at the college. They were split into groups of six and asked to discuss their experiences of the college and the Island so far, and to come to a group set of answers to the following questions:

What have the negative aspects so far/

What have been the positive aspects so far?

What could be done to make your experience here better?

They were asked to write their points in as few words as possible on 'post-its', and to put these on the wall, and to go round and look at the experiences and suggestions of the other groups, before finally deleting, adding or revising their own views. Due to the number of participants I didn't hold a final whole group discussion.

Listed below is a record of the students' responses.

The negative aspects of their experience so far:

- It hasn't often been made clear where we are supposed to be
- No bus passes
- Not enough information on student loans and tuition fees
- Bad that we have not been encouraged to mix with different students
- No loans through, sent to wrong place
- No travel costs
- Lecturers late
- Lecturers do not take up whole hour
- Not enough time for the first project
- Disorganised timetables
- Shop and café expensive
- The Vine – what a rip off £2.30 a pint
- Southern Vectis. They are useless (expensive/late)
- The possible lack of pressure is a bit worrying – might cause problems with work
- Homesick
- No info received re start date and time
- Too many things with same info
- Study skills day very tiring
- No bus passes
- Not enough info on course
- Duplicate forms
- No money – very expensive
- Too much info for one day
- Repeating

- Need LRC cards a.s.a.p.
- Living on your own
- Miss her parents
- Grants and loans not yet received
- Need more computers and also quite slow
- Surprise expense of Fairthorne Manor plus having to arrange childcare and dog sitters (!) at last minute
- Applying to Bournemouth and being sent to IoW (should know location of course sooner)
- UCAS costs to apply
- Shorter days for induction

The positive aspects so far:

- Headhunters. A good idea. Worth doing to get to know each other
- Induction. Very informative
- Headhunters
- Pool table 20p and open late
- *Student Union did a good job in settling the first year on the Island*
- Less pressure than before
- Good to be independent
- Friendly staff
- Better treatment than at High School
- Fair selection of food
- Good library/resource facilities
- Excellent range of books
- Meeting new people
- Enjoyed Headhunters
- Good Student Union reps
- Friendly atmosphere
- Socialising
- Being independent
- Meet new people
- Meet people from different cultures and age groups
- Better social life, residentials and activities
- Confidence builder
- Facilities open late
- Study skills and report writing sessions really useful
- As college is quite small, it has a good sense of community
- Good facilities
- 1st and 2nd years seem friendly with each other
- make new friends

What could be done to make things better:

- bus passes for HND students
- better transport deals
- cheaper coffee, tea etc
- more help with finance
- get rid of tuition fees
- more interaction with main campuses
- bigger groups
- more sexy students
- more activities
- more interaction with students
- Student Union bar
- Make rooms easier to find
- Better communications between mainland unis and IoW college

- It would have been beneficial to have timetable earlier to arrange childcare
 - Bigger canteen
 - Common room updated
 - Should give everyone induction leaflet so everyone knows what's going on
- Space out giving information over a few days

Staff Inductions

First Group – 2 November 1999

Positive Views. What I have liked or enjoyed about the college so far:

- The organisation cares about developing the staff as individuals (as well as part of a team)
- The college values staff and their qualifications/abilities
- Friendly and supportive staff – staff put themselves out to help
- Name badges are helpful
- There is a feeling of 'belonging' for off-campus (prison) staff
- There is an emphasis on quality
- The enthusiasm of staff
- Friendliness
- Friendly people
- Induction is well organised, especially HRD Manager

Negative views – what I have disliked about the college so far:

- High 'put downs' creep into comments about the college from existing members of staff
- More formal, written procedures should be made available for new members of staff for their initial orientation at their commencement of work at the college
- The multi-skilling of staff was needed in the departments
- There is a need for structured initial induction in the individual departments/service areas
- Run-down, old buildings
- The temperature in the rooms is either too cold or too hot – no happy medium
- The toilets in 'E' block are very smelly
- Internal politics
- Management is too intense

N.B. The above comments are reproduced in the order that they were written by the individual groups, following any revisions (which were insignificant) after each group had read the views of the other groups.

Second Group – 15 February 2000

Positive Views. What I have liked or enjoyed about the college so far:

- Very helpful receptionists
- Easy to find my way around
- Friendly staff – very welcoming
- The potential to do my job is recognised
- Prisons have a good supply of cash!!!
- Friendly, helpful and welcoming atmosphere
- Excellent LRC

Negative views. What I have disliked about the college so far:

- It has taken 4 weeks to get a computer – still no password or e-mail address (4.5 weeks)
- No information on first day. Personnel information, holiday cards, letter and contract of employment took 4 weeks)
- No health and safety information provided until the induction programme
- On my first day there was NOTHING except a desk and a chair
- No written confirmation of employment or contract
- No-one to show me around – had to find my own way
- Potential to do my job not recognised

- Site looks unwelcoming, inside and out

Third Group – 12 July 2000

Positive aspects of the college and induction:

- Meeting the Principal
- Tour of the college
- Induction in general
- Rebuilding, re-organising the structure
- Personnel information on pensions, sick pay and contracts
- Staff development programmes
- Friendly atmosphere
- God staff commitment
- Good resources
- LRC
- Well organised induction

Negative aspects of the college and induction:

- No written management structure to take away from induction
- No mention of pay structure, or progression in pay increments
- Low staff morale
- Lack of goals
- Pressure
- College looks 'tired'
- Lack of communication by management
- Internal politics, inter-departmental politics
- No information on who is running departments
- Lack of communication with 'outside' divisions of the college

Where are the classrooms going to go when the buildings are sold off?

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