

**Using the knowledge management discourse as  
a framework for the self examination of a  
school administrator's professional practice.**

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In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Education.**

**Faculty of Education**

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**Brisbane, Australia.**

January 2007

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My doctoral research has indeed been an example of the knowledge creation model for which I have argued in this dissertation. My new knowledge has been directly influenced by my needs, my life context and my relationships. Significantly it has been relationships that have supported me along my learning journey.

I must acknowledge those who have tolerated my indulgence in undertaking this study. Most significant of these has been my family. We will never know what else we could have experienced and learnt in the time that I have spent undertaking my study. I am thankful for those years that they have given me and I hope that my study will prove to be of benefit to us.

Appreciation must be expressed to my professional colleagues who have supported me through my times of self doubt and through the numerous research conversations. I have come to appreciate their insight and their willingness to give, without which this learning experience would not have occurred.

Finally I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisors Dr Brian Delahaye and Dr Geof Hill. I thank Brian for guiding me through the doctoral process and the sharing of his insights into contemporary management discourses. I acknowledge Geof for making the time to provide critical comment on my investigations. Even more importantly I acknowledge that without Geof's unwavering support this chapter in my life would have remained as 'an unread rough draft'.

## **KEYWORDS**

Knowledge management, knowledge creation, management fads, living theory action research, practitioner investigations, research reconnaissance, professional practice, decision making, educational administration, educational leadership, organisational trust, psycho-social filters.

## **ABSTRACT**

Popular management literature routinely presents management discourses that offer managers with strategies or 'recipes' for organisational improvement. Practitioners often uncritically accept and implement strategies prescribed within these discourses. Management discourses are constantly evolving to seemingly provide newer and better solutions to organisations' problems. The evolutionary pressures are evidenced through the limited life spans of many of the strategies proffered in the various management discourses. So short have been the life spans of some of these management strategies that the question of faddism has been raised (Birnbaum, 2001).

Over recent years knowledge management has filtered from the broader management discourse into the discourse of educational administration. Knowledge management practices are said to enable individuals within an educational organisation to add value to the information and knowledge that an organisation possesses.

This research used self-study to examine the effectiveness of a school administrator attempting to model explicit knowledge management principles within his professional practice. A focus of the research was the critical investigation of knowledge management as a management fad or a framework for sustainable management behaviour. Employing the living theory approach to action research allowed me to ask questions about 'how' to improve my practice and to provide evidence to support my answers. It allowed me to examine my professional practice as an educational administrator who valued knowledge, its creation and use critically.

My research learnings have been presented as propositions related to the 'how' of my professional practice and its influence on the creation and management of knowledge. The propositions are as follows.

- Proposition 1: As an administrator my practices when working with knowledge are a reflection of my ontology and epistemology. To consciously vary my professional practices to facilitate knowledge creation and management it is essential for me to make my ontology and epistemology explicit.

- Proposition 2: My professional practices related to information sharing and knowledge creation are directly influenced by psycho-social filters. Three primary psycho-social filters are context, need and relationships.
- Proposition 3: The influence of the relationship filter on my knowledge creation activities is directly linked to the relationships that exist between me and those involved in the knowledge activities. The ongoing capacity for my professional practices to influence knowledge creation is linked through relationships by my personal resilience.
- Proposition 4: My knowledge influencing practices are those practices that support the provision of opportunities for information sharing and the creation of knowledge with the specific intent of applying that knowledge in an organisational context. A primary application of the created knowledge is decision making.
- Proposition 5: Knowledge creation is an ongoing process and knowledge is only relevant at a point in time and applicable in a particular context.
- Proposition 6: My professional practices that influence information sharing, knowledge creation and decision making are explicit iterations of my power as an administrator.
- Proposition 7: Involvement in the decision making process is one of my key roles as an administrator. Decision making is a major example of the creation and use of knowledge within a school.
- Proposition 8: I acknowledge that stories are a valuable way for individuals to share information and they can act as a catalyst for the creation of knowledge.
- Proposition 9: Using the knowledge management discourse as a framework to support the critique of my professional practice challenges its branding as a management fad.

The propositions have been developed and tested through reconnaissance and two cycles of action research. These propositions have been integrated into a model representing my capacity as an administrator to influence the creation of knowledge.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KEY RESEARCH PROBLEM.

Broadly speaking, any research is related to the production of new knowledge or the refinement of existing knowledge. The challenge when working with knowledge is that it is never context free (Snowden, 2003). In chapter 1 this challenge is addressed by providing the reader with an insight into my investigations through describing the research context and problematising the research question. I identify the aims of the research and present the broad research problem and a number of associated research questions. I argue for the relevance of the research and justify the fit of the research project within a professional doctorate program.

### *1.1.1 The general context of the research project.*

This practitioner-research study is grounded in the broad discourses of management and educational administration. Many modern management discourses reflect a dominant empiricist view that sees organisations as rational systems that should operate as efficiently as possible (Mc Niff, 2000). Management discourses are constantly evolving, seemingly to provide new and better solutions to organisations' problems. The scope of this evolution is demonstrated through the limited life spans of many of the strategies linked to the various management discourses. So short have been the life spans of some of these management strategies that the question of faddism has been raised (Birnbaum, 2001). Management fads are conceptualised as those management tools which, after enjoying a brief popularity, fail but not necessarily totally disappear as remnants of fads may become incorporated into organisational culture and become part of the collective thinking (Birnbaum, 2001). Two strategies identified within current management discourses are knowledge management and organisational learning. A proliferation of references related to these two strategies within the context of education now exists. Prominent writers were, Cousins (1998), Fullan (1996), Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1998), Leithwood and Louis (1998), Leithwood (1998), Kaner and Karni (2004), Dietz, Barker and Giberson (2005), and Edge (2005).

It is my argument that the legitimacy and value of these strategies should not go unchallenged. In my mind, as well as the minds of some management researchers, rests the question of whether strategies such as organisational learning and knowledge management offer meaningful long-term solutions to organisational problems or whether they are management fads with minimal organisational benefit (Preskill & Torres, 1999). My research has partially addressed this question through its investigation of knowledge management within an educational context. The following section outlines the workplace context in which the research was undertaken.

### *1.1.2 The specific context of the research*

The research was undertaken within the context of a large and complex distance education school enrolling approximately 4500 students in courses spanning pre-school to year 12 and ranging in age from 4 years to 60 years. The school had a work force of over 180 teaching staff and 60 non-teaching support staff. Significant proportions of this workforce had worked in the school for periods longer than 10 years and were skilled distance education practitioners.

The investigation was constructed around my professional practice as a deputy principal in this large P-12 school. At the commencement of my research I was a relative newcomer to both the school and pedagogy of distance education, as I had worked as an administrator (deputy principal) within the school for only six months.

The school was being influenced by significant change forces, some unique to the organisation and others symptomatic of Queensland government schools at that time. Some of the change forces were internally generated and other, very powerful forces were being exerted from external to the organisation. The forces influenced the school in the areas of governance, leadership, pedagogy, organisational structure, delivery modes, client groups, delivery standards and service costs.

One significant challenge for the school was its transition from a Correspondence or Distance Education school to a Virtual School. The transition required a move from an established paper based delivery mode reliant on the postal service to a blended

delivery mode with a much a strong focus on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) reliant on the internet. Embracing the use of ICTs required that practitioners, expert in the paper based delivery mode needed to develop a new suite of skills. Consequently within the school there was an urgent need for the creation of new knowledge to support the pedagogical shift in the school.

The size and complexity of the school demanded that its routine operations were supported by a myriad of organisational systems. The organisational systems were evidenced through the existence of numerous committees, extensive weekly meeting requirements and complex business systems. A majority of the school's business systems were dependent on ICTs. The ICT systems also supported the collection and storage of organisational data and information used for a variety of management purposes.

From early in my time at the school I had challenged, at executive and middle management levels, the organisation's effective management of its information and knowledge resources embedded within its extensive organisational systems. My strength of conviction about how we as managers used or rather, did not use, these resources originated from the management learnings of my master's level study which I had recently completed in 1999. Specifically, my concern was grounded in a belief that a number of organisational warning signs as identified by Stewart (1997) were evident. These signs included:

- failure to use already available knowledge;
- withholding important knowledge because of mistrust or conflicts between groups;
- holding discussions from which key people were missing; and
- failure to take heed of important information.

In summary, the school's information and knowledge resources were diverse. They ranged from the information captured within the organisation's databases to the tacit knowledge held by individual organisational members. This knowledge existed within a context of an urgent need for the creation of new knowledge within the school. At the outset of my research I questioned my role in the management of this

knowledge and argued that the knowledge needed to be valued and used more effectively.

### *1.1.3 The aims of the research project.*

In identifying the aims of this research project it is important to emphasise that the study is undertaken as a professional doctorate. The focus of the professional doctorate is the enhancement of professional practice through applied investigation and problem solving rather, than a focus on a contribution to pure research or to theoretical knowledge (QUT, 2005). The intended outcome is the professional development of practitioners.

A secondary aim of the research was the opportunity for other members of the organisation to benefit professionally from the research.

### *1.1.4 The research problem*

The research employed the discourse of knowledge management as a framework for the self examination of the professional practice of an educational administrator. The investigation was confirmed as (critical friend conversation, 10/06/2004):

‘This research will examine the effectiveness of a school administrator who attempts to model explicit knowledge management principles within his professional practice. A focus of the research will be the critical investigation of knowledge management as a management fad or a framework for sustainable management behaviour.’

The process of self examination clarified my understandings of my capacity as an administrator to influence the sharing of information, the creation of knowledge and its subsequent use. To enable a meaningful examination of my professional practice two key questions needed consideration early in the research cycle.

1. How do I measure enhanced practice?
2. How do I quantify professional benefits?

There were other significant questions identified during the life of my investigations. Surfacing the following questions and reflecting upon them was integral to making sense of my situation.

1. Does the effectiveness of my knowledge management practices vary within different power/relationship contexts within the school?
2. What is the relationship between decision making and knowledge management?
3. Is knowledge creation a more appropriate description of the knowledge processes within an organisation?
4. How significant are stories within the knowledge creation activities of the organisation?
5. What roles do dialogue and conversation play in the knowledge creation process?
6. What is trust within an organisational context?
7. What is the impact of trust within an organisational context?

## 1.2 JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The following section provides a justification for undertaking the research project and defends the appropriateness of the research within the context of a professional doctorate program.

### *1.2.1 The significance of the research project*

The rationale for employing management strategies such as organisational learning and knowledge management in schools is based on the premise that their influence is a positive for students (Voogt, Lagerweij, & Louis, 1998; Leithwood et al., 1998). While the arguments justifying their application in an educational context are elaborated upon in chapter 2 there appears to be little evidence to support this premise (Louis & Leithwood, 1998; Stratigos, 2001). Much of the existing research on knowledge management reflects a dominant scientific (empiricist) worldview that organisations should be rational systems that operate as efficiently as possible (Mc Niff, 2000). The challenge is that when organisations favour the scientific worldview they embrace technical rational epistemologies which view knowledge as

an object that is stored, accessed and re-used as required. Section 2.3 provides more clarification of these contrasting worldviews.

Knowledge management behaviours reflecting a scientific worldview are often far removed from the realities and needs of practice (Mc Niff, 2000). Research by Stratigos (2001) has indicated that much of the work undertaken on knowledge management by organisations has been accomplished without substantial change in how the organisation operates. This observation is worrying in light of the view that long-term success at using knowledge for an organisation's advantage requires change in many core aspects of the organisation through the integration of knowledge with familiar aspects of the organisation, for example, strategy, process, culture and behaviour (Stratigos, 2001).

The research undertaken in this doctoral study was significant in that it provided an alternative to the popular scientific (empiricist) worldview of management. My research examined knowledge management through the alternative lens of the humanistic worldview of management which embraced personal practical epistemologies of knowledge. Examination of knowledge management through this lens focused more on the immediate and practical needs of both the workplace and the practitioner administrator in the workplace.

In this action research based self-study I have undertaken a critical examination of the influence of my professional practices that supported the management and creation of knowledge within a number of different workplace contexts. The research examined the influence of my practices as an administrator through the eyes of a number of organisational members working in a variety of scenarios. The research used conversations as the primary data source. The conversations allowed me to:

- further problematise and conceptualise the management and creation of knowledge;
- check the alignment between my perceptions of my professional practice and the perceptions of scenario members; and
- critically investigate my professional practice.

### *1.2.2 The research project as a professional doctorate program.*

In this section I provide a justification of this research project within the context of a professional doctorate program. It is important to clarify that through its structure and focus, the professional doctorate has the capacity to satisfy the needs of careers outside research in academia (Bareham, Bourner, & Ruggeri, 2000). The focus of my research and the methodology employed reflect the views of Hoddell, Street, and Wildblood (2002) who argue that the focus of the professional doctorate is to advance knowledge within practice and subsequently result in both the personal development of the researcher and the advancement of the profession, in this case, educational administration. The professional doctorate draws on Schon's (1983) concept of reflective practitioners, where research can be seen as a route from competence to excellence, through continuous improvement of professional practice.

Professional doctorates have also been the catalyst for significant debate related to the status given different research methodologies (Brennan, 1998). The justification for the legitimate use of the living theory approach to action research within this particular research project reflects academics' perceptions of high and low status for various research methodologies. Riehl, Larson, Short, and Reitzug (2000) identify that most conventional research emerging from the academic research domain is oriented toward an audience dispersed in time and space. Conversely, practitioner inquiry employing, in this case, an action research methodology is typically directed to a very different audience, one as small as the researcher or perhaps a small group of teachers within a particular school at a particular moment in time.

It is the potential influence of the power of the traditional university research community that can create problems within the practitioner researcher scenario. Traditionally doctoral studies have required that the researcher produce an original and substantial contribution to knowledge (QUT, 2005). University researchers, who also serve as dissertation advisors, often define knowledge as new only when it represents new knowledge in the formal traditional research literature, and they may resist or devalue students' attempts to write dissertations producing knowledge that is new only to a practitioner or local audience (Riehl et al., 2000). However, it can be argued that knowledge is new when it is new to the audience likely to make the best

use of it. Thus new is a relative concept, inherent in the relationship between research, researchers and audiences.

My research project clearly fitted within the focus of a professional doctorate because it was designed to meet the needs of a practising educational administrator and had a specific emphasis on the integration of theory and practice. The research project specifically addressed an issue arising from my professional practice, it facilitated my professional growth and it produced new knowledge for its intended audience.

### 1.3 GLOSSARY OF RESEARCH TERMS

Some thesis readers made comment on language specific to the research methodology and expressed concerns that examiners might not be familiar with this language. It was their recommendation that I provide the following glossary of terms.

- Action research is seen as an essentially self-managed process of collaborative and rigorous enquiry, action and reflection, which through a series of cycles of these activities, can simultaneously improve the situation being addressed and develop the skills and insights of the individuals doing it (Winter, 1996).
- Living theory action research is a way of doing research that generates a theory for living, through individual researchers asking questions about how to improve their own practice. It involves the tracking of knowledge production and its power effect and the creation of spaces for new dialogue and contestation (McNiff, 2000).
- Reconnaissance is the starting point of action research where the researcher determines where they are at, what they hope to achieve and how they think that they will get there (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003).
- Critical friends are individuals who help others find the limits of the ways that they are thinking (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

## 1.4 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Chapter 1 backgrounded the development of the research question and justified the research project within a professional doctorate program. It was argued that modern management theory reflects a dominant empiricist view that organisations should be rational systems that operate as efficiently as possible (Mc Niff, 2000). Comment was made on the general research context of modernist management discourses with a specific focus on knowledge management.

The context in which the research was undertaken was described and the focus of the research was identified as being critical reflection on my professional practice as an educational administrator using the knowledge management discourse as the analysis framework.

The research was justified as significant because it examined knowledge management through the lens of the humanistic worldview of management rather than the scientific worldview of modernist management. In justifying the research project within a professional doctorate program it was argued that the project was designed to meet the needs of a practising educational administrator and has a specific emphasis on the integration of theory and practice with potential benefits for the practitioner researcher.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous chapter provided a background and justification to the research project. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework for the research. In simple language this chapter outlines ‘what we know’ and suggests ‘what I need to find out’. The literature review is clarifying the theoretical context (Snowden, 2003) within which any new knowledge will be created. The drafting process that underpinned the literature review was a central component of my research reconnaissance (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003). As such the iteration that existed at the time of my research confirmation provided an indication of what I understood when I set off on my formal research journey. Importantly this literature review is not simply a point in time representation as at my doctoral confirmation (December 2003) but rather an active document that has been reworked and amended as both the knowledge management literature and my understanding have evolved and developed. Interspersed throughout the review are italicised paragraphs indicative of sections of reflection which have influenced my approach to the research investigations. These paragraphs are highlighted by the use of an icon, as indicated below, in the page margin.



The literature review commences with a brief background to the evolving discourse of knowledge management. The notion of management fads is identified and conceptualised. The base from which the literature review is then built is an exploration of worldviews as the ontological and epistemological perspectives that ground both individual and organisational behaviour. I then use worldviews to problematise the concept of knowledge and examine alternative conceptualisations of knowledge. The discourse of knowledge management is then critically examined and a working definition as applied to my initial investigations is provided. Finally, I explore the opportunities suggested in the discourse of knowledge management for managers, including educational administrators, working to enhance their professional practice.

## 2.1 THE EVOLVING DISCOURSE ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The following section provides a brief overview of the ongoing development of the knowledge management discourse. The growth of knowledge management as a strategy is one of a series of such strategies dating from the early part of the last century when Taylor (1911) conceived scientific management. The origin of the interest in managing knowledge can be traced to Drucker in 1969. Stewart, Baskerville, Storey and Senn (2000) suggest that he was the first to voice the opinion that the United States had shifted from an economy of manufactured goods to a knowledge economy.

Sveiby suggests that following Drucker's initiation of the term 'knowledge management', the knowledge agenda grew in three distinct phases (Lelic, 2002; Nicolas, 2004). Snowden (2002a) suggests a similar development over three generations. While various prominent knowledge management commentators such as Sveiby and Snowden may differ on the exact chronology of the development of knowledge management they broadly agree on the evolutionary changes within each of the stages.

Sveiby (Lelic, 2002) indicated that the first phase of knowledge management commenced in the mid 1980's but at that stage knowledge management was not even invented as a concept. In the period between 1985 and 1990 a few researchers were writing and thinking about the topic in isolation. Sveiby indicates that these researchers were taking their inspiration from the business realm, from philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Polanyi and were exploring the value created by leveraging the competence and skills of people, innovation and knowledge creation (Lelic, 2002, p.2). The discourse on knowledge management only became popular in the 1990s (Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000).

Sveiby (Lelic, 2002, p.2) suggests that the second phase of the development of the knowledge management discourse occurred from 1991 to 1997 and was driven by the information technology revolution and the explosion of the internet revolution which was responsible for forcing the pace of organisational change. In this phase the development of knowledge management was dominated by the proponents of

information technology and was about re-using knowledge and avoiding re-inventing the wheel (Lelic, 2002; Snowden, 2002a). Sveiby suggests that it was during this phase that the term knowledge management became popularised (Lelic, 2002). Snowden (2002a, p.2) highlighted that in the period prior to 1995 the knowledge management focus was on the appropriate structuring and flow of information to decision makers and the computerisation of major business applications which supported a technology enabled revolution in business processes. Central to the knowledge management discourse of this time was the SECI model popularised by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). The model, which is discussed later in this chapter, focused on the movement of knowledge between tacit and explicit states through the processes of socialisation (S), externalisation (E), combination (C) and internalisation (I). The model gave rise to early knowledge programmes attempting to disembody all knowledge from its possessors to make it an organisational asset (Snowden, 2002a).

As well as the knowledge management discourse, during this period of the 1990s, there were other popular management discourses related to organisational learning, knowledge creation and managing chaos appearing regularly in the management literature (Blacker, Crump, & Mc Donald, 1998). The need for managers to manage continuing change in a future without certainty was a common underlying theme associated with these management discourses (Blacker et al., 1998). Some authors have even gone as far as to suggest that knowledge management can be seen as an umbrella term for a wide spectrum of academic orientations, including information systems, organisational learning and strategic management and innovation (Alvesson & Karreman, 2001, p. 996).

In phase three of the development of the knowledge management discourse, there has been a shift back to the human issues and a reduction in the focus on information technology (Lelic, 2002; Snowden, 2002a). Sveiby (Lelic, 2002, p.2) indicated that there is a realisation that the real value of knowledge comes 'by creating environments that enable people to create and share knowledge'. The major hurdle to creating such an environment is the corporate culture of competition, hoarding and power (Lelic, 2002, p.3). Snowden (2002a, p.1) suggested that 'the third generation requires the clear separation of context, narrative and content management and

challenges the orthodoxy of scientific management'. Snowden (2002a) indicated that the change did not require an abandonment of much of the previous work on knowledge management but rather an acknowledgement that much of the work had been focused on content and the management of knowledge as a thing and the focus needed to shift to managing knowledge as a flow. Nicolas (2004) identifies the current phase of knowledge management as the strategic learning phase where knowledge management should have an impact on decision making.

In summary the 1990s saw the development of a number of management discourses with a range of associated management strategies. Two common messages within these discourses were the need for managers to manage continuing change (Blacker et al., 1998) and that managers should create conditions most conducive to continuous change through supporting continuous learning (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The discourse of knowledge management appeared to promise managers softer solutions to some of the harder aspects of their jobs linked to working with people resistant to organisational change. It also suggested ways for managers to improve their professional practices to support the development of organisational environments that enable people to create and share knowledge (Lelic, 2002).

The reality is that the life spans of many of these management discourses have been so short that the question of faddism has been raised (Preskill & Torres, 1999; Birnbaum, 2001). The question of knowledge management as a fad has been raised (Wilson, 2002). The following section provides a clarification of the concept of management faddism and questions whether knowledge management is an example.

## 2.2 MANAGEMENT FADS

Many promises of improvement are suggested in the broad management literature with the populist genre suggesting a diversity of specific strategies that provide 'recipes' for success. Unfortunately many of these management 'recipes' rarely lead to sustainable changes in organisations which subsequently supports the growth in cynicism towards management initiatives and fuels the perception of the initiatives as fads (Birnbaum, 2001, Wilson, 2002; Snowden, 2005). Prusak (2001, p.1002)

suggests that ‘the majority of skeptics take the position – not an unnatural one - that every so-called new approach is, in reality, either old or wrong’.

Management fads are conceptualised as those management tools, which after enjoying a brief popularity, fail but not necessarily totally disappear from the organisation. Remnants of fads may become incorporated into organisational culture and become part of the collective thinking (Birnbaum, 2001). Examples of management fads include, Business Process Engineering, Learning Organisations and Emotional Intelligence (Snowden, 2005). It would appear that management fads bring little sustainable change to an organisation and often serve to feed the cynicism of organisational members towards management initiatives.

More recently Snowden (2005, p.2) has outlined a generic fad cycle within the specific concept of management theory and practice. He indicates that there are the following three stages to the fad cycle.

- Firstly, an academic group studies a range of organisations and their practices. They subsequently derive an hypothesis which forms a definition of best practice. A popular management book then follows and a new fad is born.
- Secondly, consultants and information technology providers produce industrial strength recipes based on the new idea. Consultancy opportunities with associated technology solutions will follow as new organisational change programmes are implemented.
- Finally, managers go through a process based on the recipe to determine a desired end state defined in terms of economic performance, behaviour characteristics etc. Some years after the fad runs its course in industry the consultants find a lucrative secondary market in applying industrial best practice to government clients.

The existence of cynicism associated with these management ‘recipes’ in the school context has led Preskill and Torres (1999) to identify the ‘microwave oven’ theory as an approach to educational administration whereby educational institutions simply pop a new program in for four minutes with a hero principal managing it and improvement is done. There is clearly support for the view that management discourses can be classified as management fads.



*My reflection on faddism (a reminder to the reader that I am using italics to indicate reflection) is that the existence of the potential for any changes in my professional practice to be cynically viewed by my work colleagues as faddism provides challenges to the self investigation of my practice. Any investigation methodology used would have to allow for the perceptions of other organisational members to be considered equally with my perceptions as the practitioner researcher.*

However before simply labelling knowledge management as another management fad I would suggest that the determination of a truth within any management context or organisational scenario can be problematic because, for each context or scenario investigated, there will be a range of unique perspectives held by individuals. How individuals interpret a particular management discourse or organisational scenario is determined by their individual worldviews. I would suggest that worldviews influence individuals at both a macro and micro level.

The following section explores individual's worldviews and their influence at the macro level of the broader management discourse and at the micro level of the specific discourse on knowledge management.

### 2.3 WORLDVIEWS

The premise on which I build this exploration of worldviews is that individuals have their own construction of the world and create their own reality through their unique interpretations of events based on the different understandings, motives and reasoning of individuals as they act and react with their environment (Melrose, 1996). Worldviews can be based on either explicit or implicit understandings and refer to deeply held assumptions through which individuals interpret and understand the world, and subsequently take action (Kim, 1994). Mezirow (1991, p.43) used the term 'meaning perspective' to refer to the structure of assumptions within which an individual's past experience assimilates and transforms into new experience. The literature alternatively refers to worldviews as mental models, organisational Gestalts, concepts, images, beliefs, viewpoints, value sets, guiding principles or organisational cognitive structures (Appelbaum & Goransson, 1997).

Cherry (1999) suggests that a clarification of personal worldviews can be framed around two fundamental questions. Firstly, the ontological question of whether truth or reality is something waiting ‘out there’ to be found or revealed by investigative effort (realism) or whether human consciousness creates its own reality (nominalism). Secondly, the epistemological question of whether knowledge is something objective, to be accumulated independently of the perceptions of any particular observer (logical positivism) or something subjective, a product created by the observer.

Similarly, Bawden and Woog (1998) propose a model where the worldviews of individuals are constructed around two similar dimensions of belief. These are beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) and beliefs about how such reality can be known (epistemology). The model is illustrated in Figure 1. In chapter 3 I elaborate on where I am positioned within this model and provide my personal responses to Cherry’s (1999) questions.

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***Figure 1. Matrix of ontological (reductionism to holism) and epistemological worldviews (objectivism to subjectivism) (Bawden & Woog, 1998, p. 29).***

Any examination of the knowledge management discourse is problematised by the acceptance that the determination of a truth is significantly influenced by individual worldviews. The assumptions and beliefs associated with the worldviews that support the various narratives associated with the discourse must be identified and subsequently challenged. Within the context of this investigation worldviews also problematise the conceptualisations of organisations and management which I suggest are the foundations of the discourse on knowledge management. The following sections examine these conceptualisations.

### *2.3.1 Worldviews of management and organisations*

Conceptualisations of the broad practice of management are influenced by this notion of worldviews. The development of individual worldviews, whether consciously or subconsciously, results in very different conceptualisations of organisations and their management. Each worldview represents a different way of conceptualising organisations and dictates the need for different ways of dealing with them. These conceptualisations can be grouped under a range of classifications with one classification being the scientific/humanistic dichotomy. The scientific conceptualisation of management is clearly represented in Figure 1 by the quadrant bounded by worldviews of objectivism and reductionism. The humanistic conceptualisation of management is represented by the quadrant bounded by worldviews of holism and subjectivism.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the growth of management as a strategy since the early part of the last century has been based on Taylor's (1911) initial writings on scientific management. Modern management discourses continue to articulate a dominant scientific (empiricist) worldview that organisations should be rational systems that operate as efficiently as possible (Mc Niff, 2000) and should function as rational information processing machines (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Prusak (2001, p.1003) suggested that organisations are conceptualised as 'information processors, productive machines or quasi-military structures...' Snowden (2005, p.2) argued that the dominant scientific management ideology has inherited from Taylor (1911) a view of the organisation based on the necessity and probity of order where things are deemed to be known or knowable through proper investigation and that once relationships between cause and effect are discovered they repeat.

The manifestation of a scientific worldview of management was the development of organisational artefacts such as mission statements, policy papers and strategic development plans. Grundy (1996) argued that the beliefs associated with the scientific worldview could be interpreted as attempts to overcome the uncertainties of human interaction and deliver the shortest route between decision and action, between policy and practice, between problem and solution.

Compared with the scientific worldview, the adoption of a humanistic worldview conceptualised the organisation as a process of sense making and nonrational decision making (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Prusak (2001, p.1003) suggested that increasingly organisations were being seen as ‘a coordinated collection of capabilities, somewhat bound its own history, and limited in its effectiveness by its current cognitive and social skills. The main building block of these capabilities is knowledge, especially the knowledge that is mostly tacit and specific to the firm.’ A humanistic worldview permeates an individual’s conceptualisation of management, learning and knowledge; in short it is evidenced in an administrator’s professional practice.

To fully understand how varying worldviews influence an individual practitioner’s professional practice the following section explores alternative conceptualisations of knowledge.

### *2.3.2 Conceptualisations of knowledge*

Caution needs to be exercised when conceptualising knowledge and trying to define it. Knowledge incorporates many intangibles such as experience, intuition, judgement, skill and lessons learned. It can be manifested in perceptual frameworks, expectations, worldviews, plans, goals, sagas, stories, myths, rituals, symbols, jokes and jargon (Leithwood, 1998). Dueck (2001) argues that the different perceptions of knowledge are associated with different personality types and subsequently a person’s temperament determines that person’s view of knowledge. Dueck (2001) suggests that a person’s answer to the question ‘What is knowledge?’ is strongly related to the answer to ‘Who am I?’ Rephrasing Dueck’s statement within the context of my research, an individual’s definition of knowledge is seen to be strongly related to their worldviews.

The scientific/humanistic dichotomy previously applied to worldviews can be effectively applied to knowledge. As an example, Mc Niff (2000) identifies and describes two differing worldviews of knowledge:

- technical rational epistemologies; and
- personal practical epistemologies.

McNiff (2000) suggests that technical rational epistemologies reflect a scientific worldview and are the dominant form of workplace knowledge favoured by institutions. Unfortunately they are often far removed from the realities and needs of practice. A technical rational epistemology views knowledge as an object that is stored, accessed and re-used as required. Viewing knowledge as an object impacts on how it can be managed. Somebody generally owns objects, so they are property. Objects need to be kept or stored. Conceptualising knowledge as an object leads people to focus on databases and other storage devices. They are more likely to identify legal owners of knowledge components (Allee, 1997). From the worldview associated with knowledge as an object come terms such as knowledge transfer. The focus associated with this worldview of knowledge is its identification, organisation, collection and measurement.

Care needs to be taken when knowledge is viewed as an object because frequently the terms knowledge and information are used as synonyms (Wilson, 2002, p.3). Clarification of the relationship between information and knowledge is crucial in developing an individual position related to knowledge management. Information can be viewed as data in context (Steyn, 2004). Information only becomes knowledge when it is interpreted by individuals and given a context and anchored in the beliefs and commitments of individuals (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno, 2000). The contextualisation of information can be known as learning (Steyn, 2004). The context-specific nature of knowledge distinguishes it from information because the meaning is embedded in the context. Knowledge subsequently can support and inform decisions, behaviour and actions.

An alternate conceptualisation of knowledge, the personal practical epistemologies, reflects a humanistic worldview. Personal practical epistemologies (McNiff, 2000) represent a worldview that much knowledge is tacit knowledge and as such is never articulated until the need to re-use it occurs (Henczel, 2001; Snowden, 2002a). The epistemologies are immediate and necessary but not valued institutionally (McNiff, 2000). The associated worldview sees knowledge as a process and brings a very different focus to the domain of knowledge. Stacey (2000) argues that knowledge is not a thing but rather an active process of relating. A process perspective brings a focus more on the dynamic aspects of knowledge, such as sharing, creating,

adapting, learning, applying and communicating. Knowledge is seen more as a dynamic of constantly shifting, melding and merging components (Allee, 1997). Knowledge can practically be defined as a capacity to act (Sveiby, 1997). There is less concern with controlling the flow of knowledge and more interest in encouraging participation and communication. Knowledge is seen as a process of creation not just as an object to be manipulated. Mc Niff (2000) argues that a process view of knowledge is increasingly evident in organisation studies.

More recently Snowden (2002a) has suggested that knowledge is not about either thing (object) or flow (process) but rather about both. Accepting that knowledge is both thing and flow requires embracing paradox. There is more significance placed on the creation of knowledge. The following section examines the concept of knowledge creation.

### 2.3.3 Knowledge Creation

Personal practical epistemologies see knowledge as a process of creation. Inherent to this conceptualisation of knowledge is the underlying question of why knowledge is created at all. Habermas (1987), Stacey (2000) and Snowden (2002b) all argue that knowledge is always created for a purpose; it is created because people want to know something and because of their basic needs or interests. Habermas (1987) identifies three such interests: the technical interest, the practical interest and the emancipatory interest.



*From my perspective as an educational practitioner, personal practical epistemologies would appear to have linkages with the learning narrative associated with constructivist learning theories and the suggestion that learning is about making meaning. Knowledge and skill acquisition take place through socialisation and utilisation. Significantly, constructivists believe that true knowledge is more than information, it includes the meaning or interpretation of the information (Leithwood, 1998). The reconstruction or transformation of knowledge subsequently affects thinking and performance. Constructivism is concerned with how people process information in ways that affect their worldview. It proposes that individuals continually create and re-create meaning as a result of their relationship with others*

*in the social environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is a constant process of transforming existing knowledge into new knowledge through personal-social interaction (Watkins & Marsick, 1993).*

An iconic model within the evolution of knowledge management and one suggested by Snowden (2002a) as the start of the knowledge management movement was Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model. The model presents the creation of knowledge as an interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is seen as personal, context specific knowledge that resides in an individual. While explicit knowledge is more formal codified knowledge conveyed from one person to another in systematic ways such as, documents, images and other deliberate communication processes. Central to the process of knowledge creation is the fact that tacit knowledge needs to become explicit; what's unspoken must be said aloud otherwise it cannot be examined, improved or shared (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

In the SECI model knowledge creation is a never-ending cycle. It involves identifying tacit knowledge, making it explicit so that it can be formalised and encouraging the new knowledge to become tacit. Tacit and explicit knowledge work in both directions, in continual flux and movement. As knowledge is socialised and shared, it passes through four different modes of knowledge conversion (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Table 1 illustrates how in these four modes, the flow of knowledge moves from tacit to explicit to tacit once again, through the spiral of knowledge creation.

Tacit knowledge centres on worldviews that are carried internally. Tacit knowledge relies on hunches, insights and on the experience that comes from practice. Tacit knowledge spreads when people meet and tell stories or if they undertake a systematic effort to make it explicit. One weakness of the SECI model within the context of knowledge management is that the critical knowledge needed to undertake everyday actions is primarily contextual and tacit and difficult to codify or make explicit (Nidumulu, Subramani, & Aldrich, 2001).

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**Table 1. Four Modes of Knowledge Creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).**

Snowden (2002a) challenges that the third generation of knowledge management, with its focus on human issues rather than information technology, has brought with it the understanding that knowledge is not about either thing (object) or flow (process) but rather an acceptance that knowledge is both thing and flow. Within this research project, I argue for the adoption of a complex and organic conceptualisation of knowledge. By adopting this conceptualisation, it is reasonable to accept that knowledge possesses the properties of both object and process. Placed within the context of Figure 1 (p.15) the knowledge worldview is conceptualised as being positioned along the epistemological axis and not simply situated within one half of the continuum. Consequently as an object knowledge can be catalogued, organised and measured; as a process it can continually move through the stages of creation, adaptation, enhancement and application. Knowledge is subsequently depicted as a fluid and dynamic realm rather than a constant fixture or artefact. It highlights the integral role of participation and communication in the knowledge creation process. The knowledge management discourse alludes to the capacity for a manager, through their practice, to be able to manage the creation and use of knowledge. The next section examines the reality of this management promise.

## 2.4 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

As indicated in the previous section an individual's worldviews determines their conceptions of any specific management discourse. Acknowledging the inherent potential for multiple constructs within any single management discourse it is important for this research that I problematise the conceptualisation of knowledge management and identify the challenges of providing a working definition to support my investigations.

#### 2.4.1 *Knowledge management defined*

Defining knowledge management is problematised by the diversity of views held on the nature of knowledge management. Sveiby best captures the complexity of the knowledge management discourse when he indicates that, ‘The conceptual framework of knowledge management is unusual in its ambiguity, extraordinary in its depth, unfathomable in its rapid expansion and – best of all – has no single trademark or copyright owner’ (Lelic, 2002, p.1).

In short defining knowledge management can be problematic and is in no small part related to the name. Lelic (2002) highlights Sveiby’s argument that with the name knowledge management was born the misconception that knowledge could be managed. The misconception may be due to the terms knowledge and information frequently being used as synonyms. Wilson (2002, p.3) argues that ‘data and information may be managed and information resources may be managed, but knowledge can never be managed, except by the individual knower and, even then, only imperfectly. The fact is that we often don’t know what we know: that we know something may only emerge when we need to employ the knowledge to accomplish something’. Dueck (2001) argues that it is perhaps easier to describe what knowledge management is ‘not’ by using sentences indicating that knowledge is more than just information or data.

Dueck (2001) suggests that the broad knowledge management discourse has three dimensions each with an associated motto.

1. The technology dimension with the motto: Let’s have the finest technology.
2. The organisational dimension with the motto: Let’s create the utmost economic value from our knowledge assets.
3. The social dimension with the motto: Let’s share knowledge as with friends we trust.

I argue that each dimension is a reflection of individual worldviews associated with knowledge. The genesis of the individual mottos has been discussed in my previous elaboration on the scientific and humanistic worldviews of knowledge. The motto associated with technology reflecting a scientific worldview and the motto linked to trust reflecting a humanistic worldview. Dueck (2001, p.888) argues that a challenge

in developing a practical definition for knowledge management is that ‘a true definition of knowledge management has to satisfy everyone in the organisation. The soft psychologist has to accept the use of technology, and the hard technologist has to be interested in dealing with tacit knowledge and communities of practice’. The challenge in my research is that my worldview of knowledge will support my conceptualisation of knowledge management and be very different to the conceptualisations of other organisational members. Neither may be right or wrong, rather each may be more suited to individual organisational members.

The diversity of views associated with knowledge management is reflected in the development of a range of knowledge management systems. These systems can be classified into three general types (Becerra-Fernandez & Stevenson, 2001).

1. Systems that organise and distribute knowledge- these are known as knowledge repositories and comprise the majority of knowledge management systems currently in place.
2. Systems that formalise knowledge- these aim to elicit and catalogue the tacit knowledge of experts and serve to transfer their knowledge.
3. Systems that apply knowledge- these refer to systems that assist in solving problems.

It is my argument that those systems focused on solving problems must combine the actions of knowledge creation and the decision making associated with resolving problems. This argument reflects Snowden’s (2002a) previously stated assertion that the current third generation of knowledge management is related to managing knowledge as both thing (object) and flow (process) demands an acceptance of the integral role of participation and communication in the knowledge creation process. In acknowledging this importance this research project brings a humanistic worldview of knowledge to the investigation and conceptualises knowledge management as encompassing both the management of information and the management of people. Knowledge management is determined to be about continuous learning and people actively engaging with information and knowledge and then applying it. It is not solely about the management of explicit knowledge through databases as associated with a scientific worldview (Nonaka & Takeuchi,

1995). In the very end knowledge management involves managing humans, not only knowledge.

Nicolas (2004, p.23) highlights the practical implications of working with both humans and knowledge in his identification of the following 3 knowledge management strategies (KMS).

1. Technological KMS with a focus on information or explicit knowledge. Individuals have to make their knowledge explicit in order to transfer it via database.
2. Personalisation KMS with a focus on dialogue and face-to-face technique for knowledge sharing. The purpose is to facilitate learning through shared experience.
3. Socialisation KMS combining both technological and personalisation KMS. The purpose is to exchange and pool knowledge.

In accepting the humanistic worldview, the main task of knowledge management becomes to create an environment of interaction between individuals and the organisation to strengthen each other's knowledge base. In progressing his discussion on the paradoxical nature of knowledge and its conceptualisation as an active process of relating Snowden (2002a) suggests the following three heuristics to illustrate the changing thinking on working with knowledge.

1. Knowledge can only be volunteered; it cannot be conscripted.
2. We can always know more than we can tell, and we will always tell more than we can write down.
3. We only know what we know when we need to know it.

These heuristics indicate the practical realities of an administrator working with other organisational members to create and share knowledge. To this end, social and informal relationships in an organisation become important; communication between members of the organisation is crucial (Bhatt, 2000; Stratigos, 2001; Todd, 1999).

A definition of knowledge management that I used in my research conversations presented knowledge management as an holistic management practice that enables

individuals in organisations to interact with, utilise and add value to all the information, knowledge and wisdom that an organisation possesses (Todd, 1999).



*I used Todd's definition in my early discussions with my critical friends (10/06/2004). At that early stage of my investigations it was the subscription to a holistic approach developed so too did my awareness of short fallings in this definition. One significant short falling was the absence of the important role of conversation in knowledge creation.*

*Todd's definition should be viewed as a starting point for my formal research.*

The following section examines communication and identifies the difference between discussion and dialogue.

#### *2.4.2 Communication*

Communication between members of the organisation is seen as crucial to knowledge management (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Bhatt, 2000; Stacey, 2000; Stratigos, 2001; Todd, 1999). Through conversation and participation in relating and conversing, knowledge emerges in organisations (Stacey, 2000). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) indicate that central to the process of knowledge creation is the fact that tacit knowledge needs to become explicit; what's unspoken must be said aloud otherwise it cannot be examined, improved or shared. Significantly, not all conversations result in the creation of new knowledge. To understand why this occurs it is necessary to realise that there are differences between the often interchanged terms discussion and dialogue.

Discussion is about breaking conversation down into analytical parts. Discussion is an attempt to find agreement or to defend one's assumptions. Discussion is often about preserving the status quo. Discussion does not have the personal threat of dialogue as discussion is not about the change of individual worldviews (Schein, 1993).

Dialogue on the other hand, can be defined as a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that structure everyday experience (Isaacs,

1994; Schein, 1993). It is the discipline of collective learning and inquiry and is a process for transforming the quality of conversation and the thinking that lies beneath it. Dialogue is about communities and learning for change. Preskill and Torres (1999) suggest that the goal of dialogue is to bring about a spirit of understanding, not competition of ideas or debate. It enables people to be heard, allows agendas to be made public and facilitates individual, team and organisational learning. Dialogue is a strategy aimed at resolving the problems that arise from the subtle and pervasive fragmentation of thought.

Dialogue would appear to be a learned behaviour. Critical to the successful development of dialogue is the ability of individuals to engage in ‘suspension’ during meetings and conversations. Suspension occurs when individuals engage in internal listening and do not respond with an emotional reply to ideas expressed by others. It is this response that allows individuals to become reflective and start to appreciate that their perceptions may be coloured by their needs and expectations. It is this process of becoming reflective that makes participants realise that the first problem of listening to others is to identify the distortions and bias that filter one’s own cognitive process (Schein, 1993). The issue of individual worldviews or mental models is raised into individual consciousness.

Significantly for administrators dialogue can involve considerable conflict and disagreement (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). It is the conflict and tension that can be associated with an administrator’s involvement in facilitating dialogue that has the potential to make knowledge management a personally confronting process.



*Discussion and dialogue have a dual role in my research. Firstly they are used as a primary data source with my critical friends and in my scenario group conversations. Secondly my research also investigates the role of conversation and dialogue within my professional practice particularly within the context of creating and sharing knowledge within the school.*

### 2.4.3 *Summary*

To this point in chapter 2 I have outlined the theoretical construct supporting my investigations into the knowledge management discourse. It is timely, for both writer and reader, to recap my argument to this point. In the minds of some management researchers is the question of whether knowledge management is an example of another modernist management fad (Snowden, 2005). Providing an answer to this question is problematised by the reality that, for any organisational scenario investigated, there will be a range of unique perspectives held by individuals. These perspectives are variously referred to as worldviews, mental models, organisational Gestalts, concepts, images, beliefs, viewpoints, value sets, guiding principles or organisational cognitive structures (Appelbaum & Goransson, 1997). How individuals interpret a particular management narrative is determined by their individual worldviews which can be based on either explicit or implicit understandings and refer to deeply held assumptions through which individuals interpret and understand the world, and subsequently take action (Kim, 1994).

In conceptualising worldviews, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Bawden and Woog (1998) have proposed models where the worldviews of individuals are constructed around beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) and beliefs about how such reality can be known (epistemology). The resultant diversity of management worldviews can be grouped under a range of classifications, one such classification is the scientific/humanistic dichotomy. When conceptualising the organisation, the scientific view of the organisation conceptualises it as a rational information processing machine, while the humanistic view conceptualises the organisation as a process of sense making and nonrational decision making (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The different worldviews also produce different conceptualisations of knowledge and learning.

The diversity of worldviews related to knowledge and learning are reflected in the various conceptualisations of knowledge management. My worldviews, whether classified as, technical rational/personal practical, scientific/humanistic or process/object need to be surfaced. Surfacing can be supported by me clarifying my definitions of the key concepts related to this research.

In this thesis knowledge management is defined as an holistic management practice that enables individuals in organisations to interact with, utilise and add value to all the information, knowledge and wisdom that an organisation possesses (Todd, 1999). In accepting this definition the main task of knowledge management becomes to create an environment of interaction between individuals and the organisation to strengthen each other's knowledge base. To this end, social and informal relationships in an organisation become important; communication between members of the organisation is crucial (Bhatt, 2000; Stratigos, 2001; Todd, 1999).

Dialogue is defined as a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that structure everyday experience (Isaacs, 1994; Schein, 1993). It is the discipline of collective learning and inquiry and is a process for transforming the quality of conversation and the thinking that lies beneath it.

The challenge that remains to be addressed is to identify opportunities that the literature provides for my professional practice.

## 2.5 OPPORTUNITIES TO APPLY THEORY TO MY PRACTICE

Until this point of the literature review I have deconstructed and problematised components of the knowledge management discourse. In doing this I have argued for the controlling influence that worldviews exert on the individual's conceptualisations of knowledge, knowledge creation and knowledge management. I have highlighted the crucial role of conversation in the processes of sharing and creating knowledge.

The challenge now is to examine the knowledge management discourse and identify opportunities in the theory for administrators to enhance their professional practice. It is this movement from theory to sustainable practice which is central to my reflections upon management discourses as fads. The challenge is to discern the difference between an industrial strength management recipe (Snowden, 2005) and a meaningful framework for an administrator to support the development of an organisational environment where the interaction between individuals and the organisation generates organisational knowledge (Stacey, 2000).

### *2.5.1 Knowledge management and practice*

As previously discussed in section 2.4.1, the most common approach to knowledge management has involved implementing some sort of digital knowledge repository for the management of syntactic information (Grover & Davenport, 2001; Bhatt, 2000). Such an approach reflects a belief that knowledge is an object and that good information management is seen as the essential prerequisite to knowledge management (Henczel, 2001). The outcome of this approach is that most management practices related to knowledge management efforts in organisations have focused on developing new applications of information technology to support the capture, storage, retrieval and distribution of explicit knowledge. Examples of these efforts are intranetworking, data mining and data warehousing.

However the other systems of knowledge management identified in section 2.4.1 are built around an alternative worldview of knowledge, with it seen both as a process and as an object. Proponents of these systems of knowledge management argue that the ability to track down explicit knowledge in databases, guidelines or organisational charts is only the tip of the iceberg within knowledge management (Allee, 1997). It is important to acknowledge that an organisation's real knowledge has a range of appearances and it may be evidenced in organisational routines, policies and procedures. An organisation's knowledge can be embodied in the experience, skills, knowledge and capabilities of individuals and groups. If these iterations of organisational knowledge are accepted, they bring for an administrator seeking to facilitate the management of knowledge, tensions and challenges very different to those associated with the management of explicit knowledge in databases. Whereas the management of explicit knowledge asks for administrative skills and for efficiency in utilisation and distribution, the creating and sharing of tacit knowledge demands creative and social competence (Bertels & Savage, 1998).

The scope of the challenge confronting a manager seeking to work with knowledge should not be underestimated. It is substantially more difficult than managing physical assets (Stewart et al., 2000). As experience with working with knowledge grows, it has been observed that managers can over-invest in knowledge. The over-

concern that people often demonstrate with information is grounded in the desire to be careful, rational, reliable and even intelligent (Stewart, 1997). Stewart et al. (2000) identify that there is risk in developing a poor knowledge management program because bad knowledge management can be much worse than no knowledge management.



*One of the challenges in critically reviewing the practice of knowledge management is the varying use and interpretation of the terms knowledge and information. Often knowledge management is used when in reality the activity is more information management.*

Risk can be minimised by clarifying the ultimate goal of any knowledge management system. If the ultimate goal of knowledge management is to solve organisational problems, then it is most important to have systems that allow organisations to develop the ability to combine a high value form of knowledge with experience, context, interpretation and reflection and then apply the result to decisions and action (Todd, 1999; Stewart et al., 2000; Davenport, DeLong, & Beer, 1998). However, as previously discussed in section 2.3.1, it appears that most organisations have not taken such a conscious process-oriented approach to knowledge management, but rather, have viewed knowledge management as the management of syntactic information (Bhatt, 2000). Subsequently in many of these organisations, the ability to gather and store massive amounts of data far exceeds their ability to analyse and understand the data (Stewart et al., 2000).

Importantly systems that apply knowledge encompass both the management of information and the management of people. The challenge for managing systems that apply knowledge is that they are context dependent and cannot be managed through a set of predefined techniques (Bhatt, 2000). The practices that managers can most effectively employ deal with social relations in organisations through the use of personalised interactions, personal rapport and social relations in the organisation (Bhatt, 2000). These practices or behaviours require the recognition of the importance of social and informal relationships in the firm. Put simply, employing these strategies highlights the importance of communication. However a paradox develops when administrators seek to enforce strategies to develop an

organisational culture that creates knowledge management. These situations seldom provide opportunities to create knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that a bias toward generating order is ineffective in managing knowledge dynamic loops, because the very concept of order focuses on localised parts rather than on the system as a whole.



*Consideration needs to be given within this research project to the exploration of how I can enhance communication between organisational members and support social and informal relationships with a view to enhancing the creation and sharing of knowledge within a school.*

In reviewing the literature related to educational administrators working in the broader contexts of collective learning and organisational change, Mitchell and Sackney (1998) identified three major areas of influence:

- organisational structures;
- group interactions; and
- individual members.

In the following sections I have employed these three influences as a framework to examine ways my professional practice as an administrator could influence communication and relationships between organisational members and ultimately influence the creation and sharing of knowledge.

### *2.5.2 Organisational structure*

The evolution of structure has worked hand in hand with the rise of knowledge as the core resource of the enterprise (Hong, 1999). As knowledge has increased in importance, so too has the need to be able to discuss it in a way that makes sense at the individual, team and organisational levels. To achieve the appropriate levels of conversation between organisational members, the organisational structures evident for most of this century, the top down model (bureaucracy) or the bottom up model (task force), have been challenged (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997). Using their SECI model of knowledge creation (Table 1, p.20) as a framework, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that each of the common managerial models have impediments to the

quality of knowledge conversion. The top-down model provides only partial conversion focussed on combination (explicit to explicit) and internalisation (explicit to tacit). Similarly, the bottom-up model carries out only partial conversion focused on socialisation (tacit to tacit) and externalisation (tacit to explicit).

Increasingly the common feature for the new innovative forms of organisational structure is the emphasis on how the interplay of tacit and explicit knowledge of organisations can be acquired, disseminated, shared and interpreted at different levels in organisations through various mechanisms (Hong, 1999). The shifts stem from a desire to create organisations that utilise knowledge across processes and functions by attempting to minimise structure and loosen up barriers between work groups. The creation and conversion of knowledge can be influenced by managerial structures.

Emerging from the older bureaucracy and task force structures are new organisational structures that build on connections, relationships and the flow of information (Allee, 1997). These new networks do not develop from some preconceived plan but arise out of learning and experimentation. The appropriate organisational structure will depend on certain environmental factors, such as stability and complexity of environment, size, age and technical system (Hong, 1999). These organisations also possess a unique culture, style and reward system (Preskill and Torres, 1999).

The challenge for administrators is that the culture accompanying these newer systems and structures, creates situations that reveal “management as participation in a real time, emergent process, of discovery and meaning making, in which although the organisation is not ‘out of control’ exactly, managers are not ‘in control’ of what will happen” (Streatfield, 2001, p.ix). Control, which is central to the scientific worldview of management, is at the heart of a paradox that exists within the concept of managing the creation of knowledge. Managing the creation of knowledge would appear to require administrators to release control and as such have issues related to power.

Shifts in structure bring shifts in power. In a bureaucracy, the title held by an individual determines their power. In a decentralised organisation, power comes from what you know and who you know (Allee, 1997). As a result, people with knowledge have more and more power to shape the organisation and create forms of work to suit their individual preferences. Ultimately knowledgeable people are more difficult for administrators to control.

School administrators working in an environment of organisational change have been actively engaging and exploring structures within their organisations with a view to developing and refining an optimal structure (Hargreaves, 1995; Leithwood et al., 1998). In summary, those organisations that are structured to facilitate and support meaningful dialogue are those organisations that encourage most information sharing and knowledge creation. In order to get at the knowledge that resides within organisational members, people must have the freedom to make decisions and choose their own action. This requires a leadership shift from command and control to creating a climate of trust and shared understanding. Schools must focus on creating a supportive culture and enhancing the ability of people to self-organise. The reality for managers is that, in developing these types of organisations, they face the challenge of not being 'in control' of what may result from the dialogue between organisational members. The decreased control may present a contradiction to some administrators conceptualisation of management.

### *2.5.3 Group interactions*

I have previously made comment in section 2.4.2 on the importance to knowledge creation and management of dialogue occurring between the members of organisations. For dialogue to be effective, trust is required, that is, trust in each other as well as in school leaders (Argyris, 1993). While trust in each other is a noble aim, what does the achievement of this aim mean for the practice of an educational administrator?

The issue of trust within the organisation is problematic. Trust can best be defined as 'a willingness to increase your vulnerability to another person whose behaviour you cannot control, in a situation in which your potential benefit is much less than your

potential loss if the other person abuses your vulnerability' (Zand, 1997, p. 91). However, such trust should not be seen as a blind trust by employees that all decisions made by their managers are the right decisions. Grundy (1996) argues that while such trust might well eliminate challenge a better construct might be that what is required is the confidence that organisational challenges will be met with argument and evidence, and that individuals will, in turn, be appreciated for providing imaginative challenges. Grundy (1996) suggests that with trust what is really needed is confidence that an individual's challenge will be interpreted as challenging the idea, the assertion, and the evidence, not the person. Appropriate leadership will be that which fosters and protects such confidence.

The reality of this view of trust existing in schools is challenged by research undertaken by McLeod (1998) in an Australian P-12 school. He identified the following characteristics within the school he researched.

- For teachers he identified a lack of respect for each other, a resistance to change, sensitivity to criticism and poor motivation.
- For administrators he identified a fear of own staff, poor relations and poor attitude.

These characteristics did little to support the confidence to challenge or be challenged and they acted as blocks to dialogue.



*A question for consideration is how can I as a school administrator create and subsequently maintain those conditions that support trust? Preskill and Torres (1999, p. 160) suggest that when people in an organisation trust each other, it is likely the result of several professional practices, including:*

- *the consistent application of principle;s*
- *explanations for actions taken;*
- *the availability of status reports and forecasts;*
- *realistic commitments made by leaders;*
- *individuals' knowledge being shared and celebrated;*
- *the interests of people who are not present being protected;*
- *employees being informed about the organisation's status and initiatives;*

- *mistakes being seen as opportunities for learning and employees are not punished;*
- *opportunities being provided for employees to give and receive feedback; and*
- *action following from feedback.*

*This list of practices was drawn upon in developing the scenario group survey (discussed in chapter 3) and used to inform indicators of my knowledge management practice.*

#### 2.5.4 *Individual members*

The previous section clearly articulated the importance of individual members communicating with each other. In this section I expand on the influence of the individual on the organisation, with a particular emphasis on the role of leadership.

The reality of operating within an organisation that encourages dialogue is that they are not easy places to work. The conflict that can stem from dialogue occurring within the school must be seen as inevitable and should be thought of simply as an essential, necessary process leading toward growth and understanding (Mitchell & Sackney, 1998). Schools that truly experience effective dialogue are very challenging work places requiring special leadership skills.

Leadership is required at all levels within an organisation. Many management theorists (Stacey, 2000; Senge, 1990; Fullan, 1996) argue that the old leadership model that focused on a single leader who set the organisation's direction, made key decisions and led, is obsolete. Instead of this individualistic worldview which has dominated Western management practices for decades, the new and emerging model calls for an integrated, pluralistic approach to leadership (Fullan, 1993; Senge 1990). These kinds of leaders do not so much adopt knowledge management strategies but they do adopt particular principles which are ultimately reflected in the very culture and climate of the organisation.

Clearly intertwined with school leadership is the notion of the culture that school administrators engender within their school. Schein (1996, p. 11) defines culture as,

‘a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be, that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and to some degree their overt behaviour’. Culture is what underpins all organisational life and is what influences individual learning and performance (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Culture could be conceptualised as an organisational wide worldview.

The organisational culture that leaders generate has a major impact on the ability to share knowledge across time and space. As already highlighted, for knowledge sharing to become a reality, a climate of trust must be created in the organisation (Allee, 1997). An organisational culture that values the individual is solidly at the core of the learning mindset. Fundamentally they care about the people they employ and yet actively encourage and support dialogue within the organisation. McNiff (2000) supports this view when she argues that management is rooted in human relationships. If the relationships are right the outcomes look after themselves. When leaders care the narrative should not be about care in its weak version where care is manifested as getting along together, cooperative living for mutual survival. Rather, care should be viewed in its strong version, manifested as the development of mutually responsible relationships. Todd (1999) believes that at the heart of the effective implementation of knowledge management practices is building an environment and culture where the qualities of high participation, open communication and trust are valued.

**A warning.** In trying to formalise the potential for an administrator’s professional practice in supporting dialogue and sharing, there is a danger for the organisation if a sharing culture is seen to embody managed knowledge creation or learning. Stewart (2001) suggests that as a consequence of the managed approach, learning will be controlling rather than developmental, and managers will determine what is accepted as learning or not learning in the organisation. Preskill and Torres (1999) believe that if organisation members are afraid to ask questions for fear of looking incompetent or foolish, or are seen as challenging authority or the status quo, learning efforts will not succeed. Instead of a culture penalising individuals for learning, the culture should support those who dare to question and who learn from mistakes and failures. One reason people risk trying new behaviours or making their thoughts public is because they believe their efforts will be rewarded or at least appreciated and understood. In these organisations, a climate of trust and courage

predominates. The challenge for administrators is the development and sustenance of this climate.

#### *2.5.5 Summary of issues related to practice*

Whereas the management of explicit knowledge asks for administrative skills and for efficiency in utilisation and distribution of knowledge, the creating and sharing of tacit knowledge demands creative and social competence (Bertels & Savage, 1998). The practices that managers can most effectively develop to achieve this sharing of tacit knowledge deal with social relations in organisations through the use of personalised interactions, personal rapport and social relations in the organisation (Bhatt, 2000).

However, in situations where an administrator's practice works at developing an organisational culture to create knowledge management, success is seldom achieved. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that a bias toward generating order is ineffective in managing knowledge dynamics loops, because the very concept of order focuses on localised parts rather than on the system as a whole.

Dialogue and conversations within the school is about moving beyond individual analysis to make individual knowledge discussible with colleagues. Organisational structures, group interactions and leadership behaviours of individual members influence the level of organisational learning in schools.

The success factors for the new and emerging organisational structures are connections, relationships and flow of information. If schools become flatter structures with reduced bureaucracy, there will be an increased reliance on individuals to be carriers of the organisation's knowledge. Direct and meaningful dialogue within the work group is crucial to the creation of knowledge.

To create this knowledge, teachers within schools must have the freedom to make decisions and choose their own action. Such freedom will come with school leadership that focuses on creating a supportive culture and who are willing to transfer power and experience a loss of managerial control.

In group interactions trust in each other as well as in administrators is critical. Even more crucial could be the confidence that individual challenges will be seen as challenging the idea, the assertion and the evidence, not the person. Appropriate leadership will be that which fosters and protects such confidence. If organisation members are afraid to ask questions for fear of looking incompetent or foolish, or are seen as challenging authority or the status quo, communication efforts will not succeed. It is important for individual members to accept that conflict within the school must be seen as inevitable and should be thought of as a necessary process which sometimes arises from dialogue.

Knowledge management requires leadership to be exhibited not only at the executive level but at all levels within an organisation. These kinds of leaders do not so much adopt knowledge management strategies but they do adopt particular principles. These principles are ultimately reflected in the very culture and climate of the organisation. An organisational culture that values the individual, cares about the people they employ and yet actively encourages and supports dialogue within the organisation is at the heart of managing knowledge (McNiff, 2000).

## 2.6 MANAGING KNOWLEDGE - THE CHALLENGE

I have suggested that for an educational administrator seeking to work with knowledge in their school some significant challenges may exist particularly when associated with significant cultural reform. Historically reforms in education tend to be more difficult than those in other industry sectors because the education sector is just beginning to understand changes associated with their efforts at improvement (McGinn, 1999). It is extremely challenging to change the long established worldviews that underpin the operation of schools and such change will only be come when those within the system are given the opportunity to change the system (Fullan, 1996). The need for ownership needs to be considered in any school based practices focusing on the creation and use of knowledge.

While acknowledging that in schools there has been limited but increasing research undertaken regarding knowledge management, the discourse on organisational learning offers an insight into the significant challenges for schools seeking to use

changes in practice to support organisational improvement. Preskill and Torres (1999, p.187) suggest that the following behaviours are evident in many schools:

- an organisational culture that is reactive and not proactive;
- communication channels and systems are underdeveloped or under-utilised;
- information is not willingly shared because the organisation holds onto a belief that information is power;
- dialogue and asking questions are not valued;
- organisation members do not generally trust one another;
- there is a fear of making mistakes, so risk taking is avoided;
- independent work is more highly valued than collaborative work;
- a general fear of change permeates the organisation; and
- people are suspicious of any data collection effort.

In my view many of these behaviours are demonstrated in the research site that is the focus of my study.

From a positive perspective, research in schools, where teachers' involvement in dialogue and information sharing was voluntary, has indicated that most teachers were energised and found their activities intellectually stimulating and associative (Louis & Kruse, 1998). However, a number of issues were identified that challenge existing human resource management procedures and policies within schools. From an operational perspective the time to engage in conversation and dialogue needs to be built into teachers' workdays. Louis and Leithwood (1998) and Mitchell and Sackney (1998) identify that enabling teachers and school administrators to work together will require a profound change in the use of time in contemporary schools. New strategies to enable dialogue will be required as the current enterprise agreement for teachers makes the availability of more time extremely unlikely, except on a voluntary basis.

For those teachers engaging in knowledge activities the capacity of individuals to sustain their involvement was identified as a significant issue. Louis and Kruse (1998) identified that teachers' efforts in restructuring schools led to burnout of those actively involved and alienation of those who elected non involvement. If teachers didn't fit in, or they were not prepared to live with the culture and expectations of

those actively involved, they left the school as a result of the pressures they were placed under. This view of the world is at odds with current employment agreements within Education Queensland and could be easily construed as workplace bullying. The challenge for administrators is how to facilitate sustainable and continuous knowledge management activities without being seen by staff as acting coercively and leading to accusations of workplace bullying.

The notion of organisational members as knowledge workers suggests a humanistic worldview as the basis for hiring, retaining and promoting individuals. However, Starbuck (1997) presents a very different worldview held in the non-school environment. Knowledge intensive firms aggressively pursue new experts with wanted knowledge and they limit the job security of continuing experts. This is not a management practice supported under the current Enterprise Agreement between the Queensland Teachers' Union and Education Queensland.

There appear to be many potential benefits for a school administrator who can embed knowledge management principles into their professional practice. However there are significant challenges for practitioners one of which is teachers' cynicism towards management initiatives and their perception of the knowledge management as another fad (Birnbaum, 2001; Wilson 2002; Snowden, 2005). Sceptical teachers support Prusak's (2001, p. 1002) suggestion that 'every so-called new approach is, in reality, either old or wrong'. My investigations in this research project focus on the reality of an administrator consciously employing knowledge management principles within their professional practice.

## 2.7 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE

Modern management theory continues to reflect a scientific view that organisations should be rational systems that operate as efficiently as possible (Mc Niff, 2000). The rational and efficiency driven view of management is the dominant conceptualisation portrayed in the discourses on modern management. Knowledge management is an example of current discourse of modern management.

Many promises of organisational improvement are offered to managers through the various discourses on management with the populist literature suggesting a diversity of specific strategies that provide 'recipes' for success. Unfortunately many of these management 'recipes' rarely lead to sustainable changes in organisations which subsequently supports the growth in cynicism towards management initiatives and fuels the perception of the initiatives as fads (Birnbaum, 2001, Wilson 2002; Snowden, 2005).

Determining whether all or some management strategies are fads is problematised by the reality that for any organisational scenario investigated, there will be a range of unique perspectives or worldviews held by individual practitioners. Worldviews refer to deeply held assumptions through which individuals interpret and understand the world, and subsequently take action. How individuals interpret a particular management narrative is determined by their individual worldviews (Kim, 1994). Worldviews problematise the determination of a single truth, for example, whether knowledge management is a fad.

In conceptualising worldviews, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Bawden and Woog (1998) have proposed models where the worldviews of individuals are constructed around two particular dimensions of belief. These are beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) and beliefs about how such reality can be known (epistemology). The resultant diversity of management worldviews can be grouped under a range of classifications, one such classification is the scientific/humanistic dichotomy. The worldviews influence the conceptualisations of the organisation, knowledge and knowledge management. When conceptualising the organisation, the scientific view of the organisation conceptualises it as rational information processing machine, while the humanistic view conceptualises the organisation as a process of sense making and nonrational decision making (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). When reflecting a humanistic worldview, knowledge management is seen to encompass both the management of information and the management of people.

A humanistic worldview determines that the process of knowledge management is about continuous learning and people actively engaging with information and knowledge and then applying it. It is not solely about the management of explicit

knowledge through databases as associated with a scientific worldview. In accepting the humanistic worldview the main task of knowledge management becomes to create an environment of interaction between individuals and the organisation to strengthen each other's knowledge base. To this end, social and informal relationships in an organisation become important, communication between members of the organisation is crucial. The acceptance of this worldview clouds the differences between the narratives of learning and knowledge management and highlights the significance of communication between organisational members.

Learning is a constant process of transforming existing knowledge into new knowledge through personal-social interaction (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Constructivist learning is concerned with how people process information in ways that affect their worldview. Individuals continually create and re-create meaning as a result of their relationship with others in the social environment (Vygotsky, 1978)

The common ground between individual learning and organisational learning is the crucial role of sustained dialogue, a form of relationship, in changing the worldviews of individuals within an organisation. Within the context of individual learning dialogue is the catalyst for individuals becoming reflective and starting to consider their perceptions and challenging their individual worldviews. If dialogue is accepted as being the catalyst for individual learning, it then can be seen as being the catalyst for group and organisational learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Parker & Stacey, 1995).

## 2.8 SUMMARY OF THE KEY REFLECTIONS

My investigations in this research project focus on the reality of me as an educational administrator consciously employing knowledge management principles within my professional practice.

- What does that practice look like? What difference, if any, does the practice make to me and the people with who I work? Is it nothing more than a fad and making no sustainable difference?
- One of the challenges in reviewing the practice of knowledge management critically is the varying use and interpretation of the terms knowledge and

information. Often knowledge management is used when in reality the activity is more information management.

- My investigations need to examine how I can enhance communication between organisational members and support social and informal relationships with a view to enhancing the creation and sharing of knowledge within a school.
- Another question for consideration is how can I as a school administrator create and subsequently maintain organisational conditions that support trust?
- Any methodology employed to investigate my practice must allow for the perceptions of other organisational members to be considered equally with my perceptions as the practitioner researcher.

Providing clear answers to these questions is problematic with the choice of methodology employed to address these questions problematised by the influence of my worldviews on my conceptualisations of management and knowledge. As a result, research in professional areas concerned with understanding people, which includes management, is not a system of accumulated certainties, but is always a matter of interpretation (Winter, 1996). The acceptance of this reality demands that in order to make decisions, researchers are forced to choose one interpretation or another. So from a methodological perspective, rather than merely applying theoretical knowledge to particular situations, practitioners must engage in more inductive forms of reflection and experimentation that enable them to address the more ill-defined and messy problems that characterise administrative practice (Schon, 1983). Chapter 3 addresses the issues associated with the selection and subsequent implementation of the research methodology.

### **3 ISSUES OF METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter 1 the problem to be investigated and the context in which the investigations would be undertaken were identified and discussed. Chapter 2 provided a theoretical context for the research by drawing upon the contemporary discourse on knowledge management. In this chapter I have outlined the methodology used to undertake my investigations, justified the selection of the methodology and backgrounded the insider (practitioner) facilitated action research approach employed. I have elaborated upon the processes used in the collection and analysis of the evidence. Finally, ethical issues associated with the research are highlighted.

My primary justification for insider facilitated action research was its capacity to enable me, as an administrator, to research within my workplace and subsequently generate meaningful new knowledge valid to that specific workplace. Importantly, the knowledge that I generated as an insider researcher was both created and used in the same setting and represented a powerful lever for personal, professional and organisational transformation (Anderson & Jones, 2000). There was a natural synergy between the potential for transformation offered through using an insider action research methodology and the stated aims for this research as outlined in chapter 1. More specifically, employing a living theory approach to action research allowed me to ask questions about ‘how’ to improve my practice and to provide evidence to support my answers (McNiff, 2000). In seeking answers to the ‘how’ questions, action research became for me a way of doing research that generated a theory for living rather than a formulaic process supporting the collection and analysis of data.

The research was a self-study undertaken by me as a school administrator. Its focus was my professional practice particularly in the context of knowledge management. I use the term self-study to describe research about me as a practitioner being thoughtful about my practice; it is reflective inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 1996). The primary objective of the research was the enhancement of my professional practice

as an educational administrator. In the process of investigating my practice a number of significant questions related to knowledge management were addressed. These questions are identified in section 1.1.4. In subsequent chapters I discuss my effectiveness in achieving my primary research objective and provide feedback on the identified questions.

The research also provided the potential for benefiting:

- those involved in the research process;
- members of the wider organisation; and
- the broader profession of educational administrators.

In identifying the broader potential of my research I have been very careful to not presuppose who will use the learnings generated by my work and I have not made any broad statement of organisational benefit. However it is my proposition that the creation of the completed research artefact has provided the opportunity for the advancement of the broad professional area of educational administration embracing school leadership and school management.

Bearing in mind that my professional practice was the focus of this investigation, a methodological challenge was the identification of a practitioner methodology that supported self study. The following sections of chapter 3 argue for living theory action research as the most appropriate practitioner facilitated action research methodology to support the critical investigation of my professional practice.

### 3.2 IDENTIFICATION OF AN INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

Management literature suggests that there are a number of research methodologies that could be employed by a practitioner seeking to research their practice within the context of their workplace (Gill & Johnson, 1991). Arguing for the best methodology is largely ‘a pragmatic rather than a logical argument and demonstrates the fitness for function’ of the chosen methodology (Swepson, 2004, p.2) as every methodology has associated dilemmas and implications. For the individual researcher the selection of an appropriate research methodology is underpinned by

addressing two fundamental personal questions (Cherry, 1999). Firstly, the ontological question of whether truth or reality is something waiting 'out there' to be found through investigative effort or whether human consciousness creates its own reality? Secondly, the epistemological question of whether knowledge is something objective, to be accumulated independently of the perceptions of any particular observer or something subjective, a product created by the observer? Personal responses to these two questions are provided in the following section.

### *3.2.1 My research paradigm*

Providing answers to Cherry's two questions clarified how I understood and explained certain aspects of reality, that is, the questions clarified my research paradigm (Kuhn, 1962). I use the term research paradigm to differentiate between two distinctive conceptualisations for how phenomena are proposed (Gill & Johnson, 1991 p.166). The paradigms positivism and post-positivism embrace two contrasting frameworks for thought (Kuhn, 1962). I do not intend to argue cases for positivism and post-positivism as there is an extensive literature highlighting the strengths and weakness of each paradigm and recording the arguments for and against researcher positioning within each paradigm. Rather my intention is to argue that as a person and as a researcher I am situated within the broad research paradigm of post-positivism.

Ontologically, I believe that reality or truth is created by human consciousness and that in many situations there is no single truth. A consequence of this belief is my acceptance that as individuals make sense of particular occurrences and situations there can be multiple interpretations and realities of the situation. Each individual has their own construction of the world and creates their own reality and their own learning pathway through it (Melrose, 1996). The development of understanding in such a way can be classified as hermeneutics, a process that supports gaining understanding of our shared humanity and of the position, concerns, thoughts and feelings of others (Webb, 1990). The hermeneutic world recognises multiple interpretations of events, based on the different understandings, motives and reasoning of unique individuals. I would describe my ontology as a hermeneutic ontology.

Translating this hermeneutic ontology into the context of my practice means that any reality developed within the context of educational administration is not a system of accumulated certainties as in the positivist paradigm. Rather the reality created is a matter of interpretation (Winter, 1996) and the challenge for me as researcher in such a context is whether any finding is true in every instance or for all members of the organisation. Multiple interpretations with an associated potential for multiple truths are the essence of the social world that is educational administration (Grundy, 1996).

Epistemologically, I believe that knowledge is something subjective, a product created by the observer. I would describe my epistemology as an epistemology of practice. Schon (1983, p.69) suggested that an epistemology of practice places technical problem solving within a broader context of reflective inquiry and argued that reflection-in-action can be rigorous in its own right. It is by monitoring and reflecting on practice that a theory of personal practice is generated (McNiff, 2000). A catalyst for individuals becoming reflective and starting to consider their perceptions and challenging their individual worldviews is dialogue (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Parker & Stacey, 1995). In chapter 2 I argued that it is through sustained dialogue that the worldviews of individuals change. Dialogue and conversation play a central role in the emergence of knowledge because it is through the dynamic interaction that individuals create new points of view and facilitate the creation of knowledge (Stacey, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

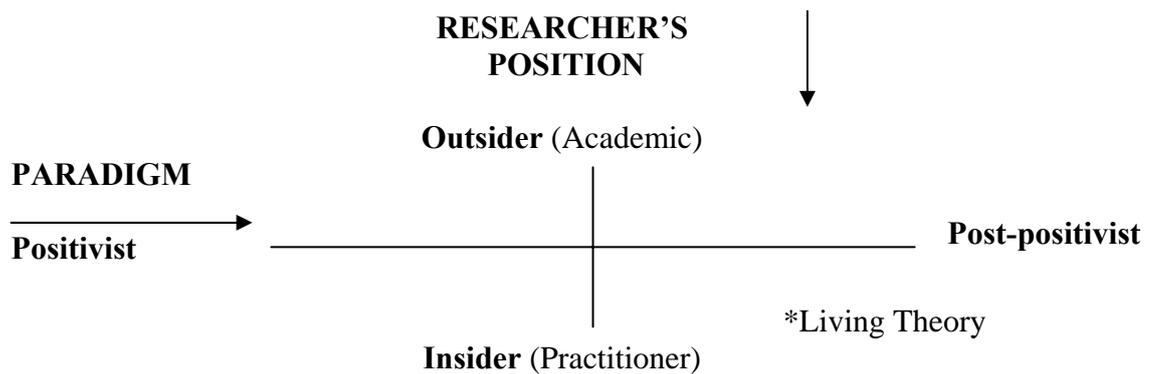
In categorising my epistemology as practice based it becomes important to clearly outline my worldview of the practice of management. My reality of management does not embrace those images frequently promoted in modernist discourses, where the manager is seen to be working in an organisation where issues are seen as 'clear, simple, clean, orderly and neat' (Denning, 2001, p.115). Rather my reality is that of a manager working within an organisation that is 'complex, messy, fuzzy, irregular, asymmetrical, random and in continuous disequilibrium' (Denning, 2001, p.115). My worldview of administrative practice is one characterised by ill-defined and messy problems. Schon (1983) flagged the requirement that to research management practices within such a complex and messy world, practitioners must engage in more inductive forms of reflection and experimentation.

In summary, my personal worldviews of truth and knowledge creation, that is, my ontology and epistemology, position me within the broad research paradigm of post-positivism. My positioning within a post-positivist research paradigm is grounded by my strong belief that within the social world there are multiple interpretations with an associated potential for multiple truths.

### *3.2.2 Research methodology options*

Having clarified my research paradigm my next challenge is to identify a research methodology that draws upon inductive forms of reflection (Schon, 1983) within an environment of multiple truths (Grundy, 1996). In any given research context the selection of an appropriate methodology is determined by the relationship that exists between the positioning of the researcher (insider or outsider) and the research paradigm embraced by the researcher. I have conceptualised this relationship as the matrix modelled in Figure 2. Individual methodologies can be situated within the matrix by overlaying the position of the researcher relative to the research problem, against the research paradigm held by the individual researcher. The horizontal plane of the matrix indicates the researcher's paradigm, represented as the positivist/post-positivist continuum. The vertical plane identifies the relationship between the research problem and the researcher, represented as the insider (practitioner)/ outsider (academic) continuum. The model has similarities with the Bawden and Woog (1998) model discussed in chapter 2 which represented the influence of an individual's ontology and epistemology on their worldview of management. The following sections provide justification for my ultimate methodology positioning as represented by \*Living Theory in Figure 2.

At this point, while exploring methodological options, I clarified that while Figure 2 indicates that research methodologies can be easily defined and categorised within a particular paradigm, the reality is that there can be a blurring of the boundaries between some research methodologies relevant to insider research. McNiff (2000, p. 166) suggested that there are "considerable cross-overs; no one paradigm is 'pure' in the sense that it operates within clear demarcation lines, and many approaches dip in and out of others. There is much methodological borrowing and sharing, and what Giroux (1992) calls border crossings."



**Figure 2. Matrix of research methodologies.**

My positioning as a researcher was largely determined by the fact that this study was undertaken as a requirement for studies in a professional doctorate program. As indicated in chapter 1 the focus of the professional doctorate is the enhancement of the researcher’s professional practice through applied investigation and problem solving rather, than a focus on a contribution to pure research or to theoretical knowledge (QUT, 2005). Such a focus invites the use of methodologies, such as insider research and self-study. Previously, in chapter 1, I have specifically argued for the use of insider or practitioner facilitated action research as a legitimate methodology for use within a professional doctorate research program. The specific nature of the research topic, that is, my professional practice, logically suggested that insider research in the form of self-study was the most appropriate methodology.

In positioning myself as an insider researcher, I was cognisant of a broader debate about the relative value of being an insider or outsider researcher. The debate about the merits of insider and outsider researchers has generated distinctions that reflect the position of the researcher; examples of these distinctions include practical research and formal research or inquiry and research. The distinctions are often used to confer status differences that devalue insider generated knowledge because it is seen to not measure up to the rigor of formal knowledge (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998; Fenstermacher, 1994; Richardson, 1994). From a traditional research perspective, an insider studying their own practice and in their work setting clearly raises issues of objectivity (insider bias), reactivity (changing the setting as one studies and acts within it) and distortion (the researcher’s position of authority distorting the responses of subordinates) (Anderson & Jones, 2000).

It was my experience that being positioned as an insider researcher supported the generation of knowledge that was both created and used in my work setting and which provided leverage for personal, professional and organisational transformation (Anderson & Jones, 2000). It also removed the theory-practice gap which can exist when an outsider researcher makes decisions about another person's practices (McNiff, 2000). Having identified that positioning as an insider researcher was my preferred location as an investigator, the remaining challenge was to determine which of the methodologies situated within the post-positivist paradigm 'demonstrated the best fitness for function' (Swepson, 2004, p.2).

The ultimate decision of research methodology was guided and influenced by the following criteria.

- The inherent focus of the professional doctorate, that is, investigation into my professional practice.
- The complex and chaotic nature of the context of my professional practice, that is, educational administration.
- The need for alignment between any chosen methodology and my personal ontology (hermeneutic) and epistemology (practice based).

In particular it was the final criterion and its need to combine an awareness of the potential existence of the multiple realities held by those associated with my practice that highlighted the potential of employing inductive forms of reflection and research in my investigations. While the action of being reflective about my practice appears straight forward there is a need to clarify what I mean by reflective practice and what it can bring to my investigations. In providing this clarification the next section distinguishes between reflective practice and critical reflective practice. It also introduces action research as a broad practitioner methodology that can support reflective practice.

### 3.3 REFLECTIVE AND CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

The term 'reflective practice' was popularised by Schon (1983) who argued that employing reflective practice supports the identification of a personal theory by the practitioner and is crucial as it drives the practitioner's actions. However the phrase

is now often used simplistically to denote ‘thinking about things’ (McNiff, 2000, p.181). Reflection at its simplest level allows an individual to engage with experience and creates an opportunity to learn how to do things differently (McNiff, 2000) through drawing on different aspects of prior professional and general knowledge (Anderson & Jones, 2000). Through reflection a practitioner can surface the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialised practice, and can make new sense of the situations which they may allow themselves to experience (Schon, 1983). By monitoring and reflecting on practice, a theory is generated that is the property, perhaps tacitly held, of an individual practitioner and as such it constitutes a personal theory of practice (McNiff, 2000) or epistemology of practice (Schon, 1983; Anderson & Jones, 2000).

However, in conceptualising reflective practice, I am presenting the view that reflection can occur at the even deeper level of critical reflection. Critical reflection with its associated problematisation of current practices allows our unexamined assumptions to be examined and our very selective view of the world through which we consistently approach life to be challenged (Peters, 2002; Anderson & Jones, 2000; Mezirow, 1990; Bawden & Woog, 1998) and ultimately to transform our critical worldviews (Hall, 1996; Melrose, 1996). Critical reflection involves both critical thinking and self-reflection and it is important to distinguish between these two processes.

Thinking critically constitutes a rigorous methodology, in which practitioners confront a particular phenomenon, and deliberately become aware of, and carefully examine, their own response to it. Thinking critically is about learning to see through new eyes which is a deliberate process consciously undertaken critically (McNiff, 2000, p. 181). In the context of my investigations the particular phenomenon was the discourse of knowledge management.

Self-reflection is complex and involves understanding one’s own process of coming to know, an appreciation of what happens when tacit knowledge becomes explicit, and the transformation that takes place in the individual during the process. Self-reflection is a developmental process (McNiff, 2000, p. 181). In the context of management a manager’s self-reflection consists of on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing,

restructuring, and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena; often it takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation (Schon, 1983, p.241).

A practitioner employing critical reflection is in effect a researcher into their own practice, developing and redeveloping personal theories cyclically, as a consequence of putting these theories, as they arise, into active practice and then reflecting on that practice and the learning that has taken place (McNiff, 2000). Critical reflection addresses the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are posed and defined in the first place. An individual becomes critically reflective by challenging the established definition of the problem being addressed (Mezirow, 1990). Critical reflection is concerned about the reasons for and consequences of what we do (Mezirow, 1990).

The most significant learning experiences in adults involve critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1990). A cyclical process of new learning or theory development occurs as action generates reflection, and reflection influences new action. An individual reassesses their own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling and acting. In a structured and rigorous form, this process, sometimes classified as action research, generates a continuous cycling between preunderstanding (lack of understanding) and understanding (Gummesson, 1991).

Action research can then be seen to be an essentially self-managed process of collaborative and rigorous enquiry, action and reflection which, through a series of cycles of these activities, can simultaneously improve the situation being addressed and develop the skills and insights of the individuals doing it (Winter, 1996). Gummesson (1991) refers to this cycling as the Hermeneutic Spiral. It is important to understand that while there can be a suggestion of closure through action research, ultimately, when action research is used, closure is not possible and any answer is temporary and immediately becomes a new starting point for further exploration (McNiff, 2000).

Within the broad research area of action research there are a number of iterations of action research with some being more conducive to reflective practice than others.

One approach to action research that supports critical thinking is the critical theoretic approach to action research. The following section provides an insight into the critical theoretic approach to action research.

### *3.3.1 Critical theory and action research*

In fitting with the post-positivist paradigm, critical theorists acknowledge the socially constructed nature of knowledge and hold that knowledge is never an absolute entity existing in a transcendental sense separate from people. Critical theorists understand that nothing in human relations is given but that everything people do and say is conditioned by other influences, both from the external world and also from the inner mental world (McNiff, 2000, p178). Critical theorists raise questions about how management is theorised, not only in terms of what good management practice should look like, but also in terms of how managers think about their work and produce their own theories of management (McNiff, 2000, p.185). Critical theory supports the deconstruction and reconstruction of organisational practices (McNiff, 2000).

The critical theoretic approach to action research encourages participants to become aware of, and work to overcome, the controlling forces that influence and potentially distort their work practices. The focus of the critical theoretic approach is on individual emancipatory issues (McNiff, 2000). Through critical theory came the regeneration of the Aristotelian concept of praxis, the idea that personal theory and practice grow, develop and adapt in unison and are not artificially separated (Melrose, 1996).

From my perspective as a practitioner researcher, the critical theoretic approach to action research provided the potential for critical reflection and the problematisation of my current professional practice (Anderson & Jones, 2000). Such action would support the examination of unexamined assumptions, challenge my very selective view of the world through which I consistently approach life (Bawden & Woog, 1998) and may ultimately transform my critical worldview (Hall, 1996; Melrose, 1996).

However a methodological weakness with the critical theoretic approach to action research is associated with the conversations that occur as individuals strive for mutual understanding. Problems can arise from the consequences of unequal power in the conversations between people as they strive for understanding (Anderson & Jones, 2000). Critical theory was seen to lack in its capacity to clarify the power relationships within the organisation and their influence on my professional practice. It would have been unrealistic, even dangerous for me, as an administrator undertaking research within my workplace, exploring the influence and effectiveness of my professional practice, to not have considered the influence of power relationships. It was this potential for my positional power to influence the authenticity and trustworthiness of the outcomes of my investigations that motivated my interest in the living theory approach to action research as a practitioner methodology to support my critical reflection.

While the critical action researcher generates answers to the ‘who’ and ‘why’ questions endemic to action research (Jennings & Graham, 1996) what are not answered are the questions of ‘how’. The ‘how’ questions are central to a practitioner and particularly an administrator critically reflecting on their practices. The questions related to the ‘how’ focus on power and the practices, techniques and procedures by which it operates (Jennings & Graham, 1996). Answering the ‘how’ questions involves the tracking of knowledge production and its power effect and the creation of spaces for new dialogue and contestation. In seeking answers to the ‘how’ questions action research can become a way of doing research that generates a theory for living, through individual researchers asking questions about how to improve their own practice (McNiff, 2000 p.199). Doing action research in such a way places the ‘I’ at the centre of the enquiry process and means that the research can be seen as a form of self-study (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003, p. 9). The following section provides a justification for my use of the living theory approach to action research within my investigations.

### *3.3.2 The living theory of action research*

The living theory approach to action research challenges me as an administrator undertaking research within my workplace to consider the influence of my positional

power on the validity of my research findings and on the determination of truth (McNiff, 2000). By drawing on postmodern thinking action researchers can reconceive the concept of action research in terms that integrate it into a study of power (McNiff, 2000). It requires a researcher to consider meaning in terms of relations of struggle embodied in everyday practice and in the local contexts (Jennings & Graham, 1996). Power is viewed as relationships rather than the singular term power and as such it is associated with practices, techniques and procedures (Foucault, 1980). Power and knowledge are dimensions of the same practices and social relations with power informing knowledge and producing discourse (Foucault, 1980). Power unintentionally achieves strategic effects through methods of discipline and surveillance. These methods of discipline and surveillance are a form of knowledge, constituted not only in texts but also in definite organisational practices (Foucault, 1980). Viewing my practice through the lens of postmodernism reflects my stated ontology, in that it forces me to acknowledge and accept that my actions could have multiple meanings. For the action researcher, understanding power as a relational activity widens the scope from the who and why questions endemic to action research, to questions of how. The questions related to the how of power focus on the practices, techniques and procedures by which it operates.

In embracing power influences, the living theory approach encourages individuals to clarify the values base of their work and to try to live their values in their practice, recognising that this inevitably gives rise to contradictions. The focus is to try to understand and aim to resolve the contradictions so that the researcher may work more productively and enable others to do the same (McNiff, 2000). 'Employing the living theory approach to action research is a means for people to produce accounts to show how and why they are claiming to have become better practitioners' (McNiff, 2000, p.199). Through individual researchers asking questions about how to improve their own practice, living theory action research becomes a way of doing research that generates a theory for living (McNiff, 2000, p.199). Live evidence is gathered from testimonies of others on whom the work impacts, that the quality of their life has really improved (McNiff, 2000). The key tenets of living theory action research are as follows (McNiff, 2000, p.203).

1. I, the researcher, am central to the process;

2. I am learning first about myself in order, possibly, to change a social situation;
3. I am not aiming for closure but ongoing development;
4. The process is participative; and
5. The process is educational.

To this point I have argued that within the context of this research project, action research in general and the living theory approach specifically ‘demonstrates the fitness for function’ (Swepson, 2004, p.2) of the research methodologies. Living theory addresses the criteria for an appropriate research methodology that I had outlined earlier in this chapter:

- Focuses on my professional practice;
- Embraces my ontology of multiple realities and my practice based epistemology;
- Acknowledges the complexity of working in administration with its associated power issues; and
- Employs inductive processes such as self reflection and critical thinking.

In the next section I will elaborate on the living theory approach to action research as specifically employed within this research project. In particular I will highlight the roles of dialogue, conversation and narrative in my investigations.

### 3.4 SPECIFIC METHODOLOGY

Before undertaking a detailed discussion of the specific research methods employed within this investigation, I will quickly revisit the focus of my research and the context in which it was undertaken. The research was a self-study of my professional practice as a school administrator particularly as seen through the framework of knowledge management.

The investigation was constructed around my professional practice as a deputy principal in a large P-12 school. The school was being influenced by significant change forces, some unique to the organisation and others symptomatic of

Queensland government schools at that time. Some of the change forces were internally generated and other, very powerful forces were being exerted from external to the organisation. The forces influenced the school in the areas of, governance, leadership, pedagogy, organisational structure, delivery modes, client groups, delivery standards, and service costs.

In undertaking my investigations I adopted an approach that broadly encompassed the framework for living theory action research suggested by McNiff (2000, p.204). She indicated that living theory action research normally consisted of the following stages:

1. review current practice;
2. identify an aspect to improve;
3. imagine a way forward;
4. try it out;
5. take stock of what happens;
6. modify plan in the light of what is found and continue with the action;
7. monitor what is done; and
8. evaluate the modified action.

The listing of eight steps suggests an orderly linear research process. McNiff (2000) warns that an inherent danger for those who engage with action research is that they conceptualise it as a neat process following a linear format. The reality is that any plan in action research should be viewed as only a broad plan because sometimes things do not work out neatly and a good deal of creative zigzagging is required to get back on course and sometimes they do not get back on course (McNiff, 2000). In a similar vein, Whitehead (2003) argues that a researcher doesn't have to select a chosen research methodology from the start. To support his argument he cites Dadds and Hart (2001) who suggest that it is important for insider researchers to trust their methodological inventiveness to create their own way through their research. Understanding how to deal with the complexities and vagaries of the situation is at the heart of the action research process.

In employing the living theory approach in my research, I sought to realise its full potential for my personal and professional renewal. In refining my understanding of

the approach I came to acknowledge that living theory was not just a formulaic approach to undertaking action research but rather ‘a lived practice, not something only to be spoken about but also something to be done’ (McNiff, 2000, p.199).

The research project had two distinct phases. They were:

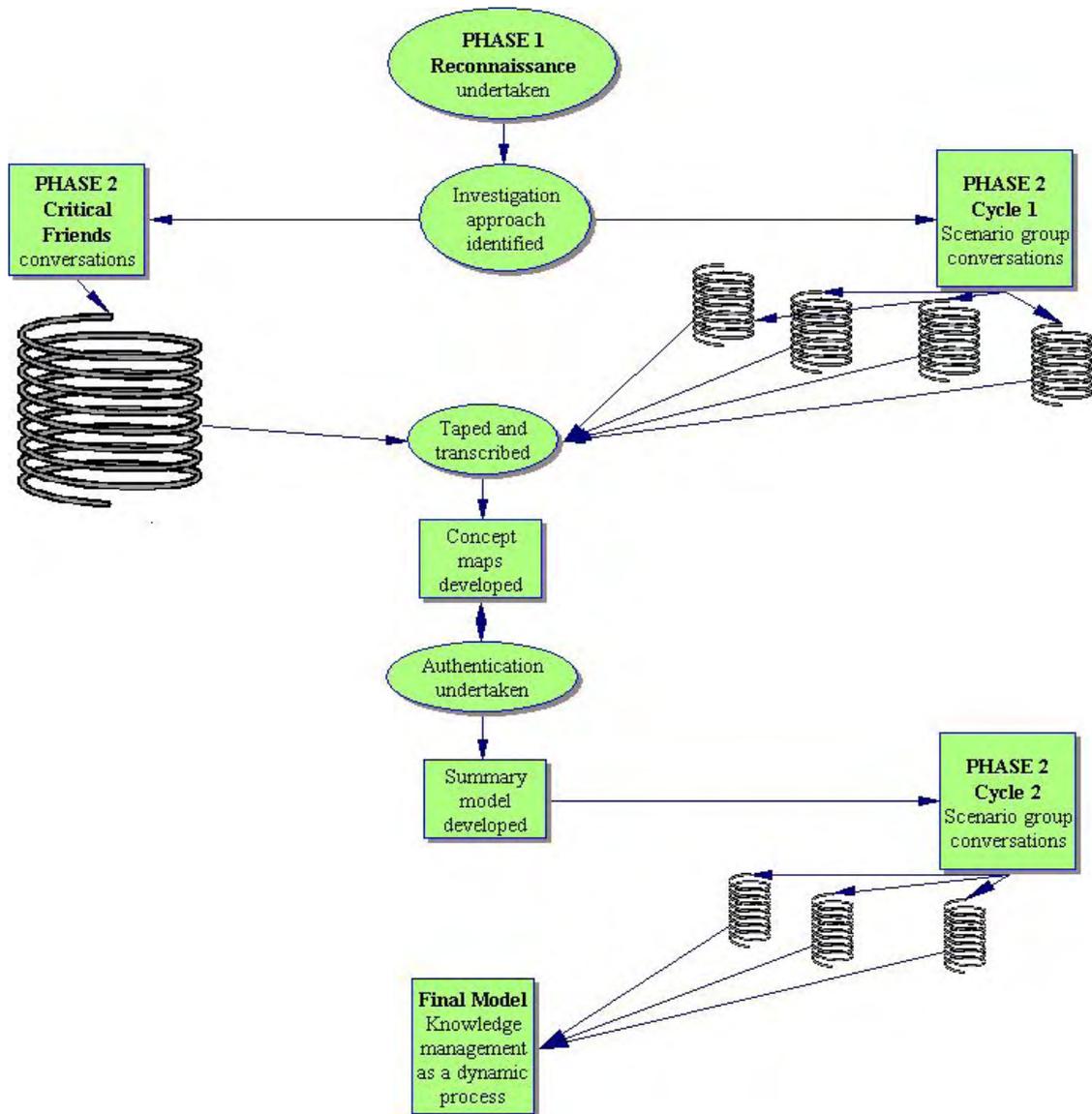
- phase one – reconnaissance; and
- phase two - action research proper (2 cycles of action research).

Phase 1, the period prior to the formal presentation of my doctoral confirmation proposal represented the reconnaissance phase. During this period no official approval had been provided by the university to formally commence my investigations. However within the context of living theory action research significant investigations into my practice had already commenced. I identified this phase as the reconnaissance phase of my investigations. There is very little literature about reconnaissance but Mc Niff et al. (2003) suggest that during this phase I had to realistically determine where I was at, what I hoped to achieve and how I thought that I would get there. Reconnaissance was about clarifying the starting point in my ‘real world situation’ (McNiff et al., 2003, p.35). This is documented in chapter 4.

Phase 2, the period post doctoral confirmation, represented the action research proper phase with its rigorous and structured investigations into my professional practice.

To various degrees each of the eight stages of action research as outlined by McNiff (2000) were situated within both the reconnaissance and action research proper phases of the research. An important difference was that within the action research proper phase the eight stages were more deliberate and explicit than within the reconnaissance phase. The action research proper is documented in chapters, 5, 6 and 7.

In the following sections I have outlined the approaches that I employed in collecting and making sense of the data. To support the reader’s understanding of these approaches an overview is provided in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Research process overview.**

### 3.4.1 Reconnaissance phase

My reconnaissance activities involved structured reading, planning, trialling new practices, discussion and reflection upon issues broadly linked to knowledge, its creation and its management. The reconnaissance phase involved several cycles of action where I moved at varying rates and in varying order through the 8 stages of McNiff's model (2000). Within these cycles were the following two distinct areas of focus.

- Self reconnaissance- the exploration of my beliefs and behaviours within the areas of leadership and management.

- Situational reconnaissance- the exploration of the research context, investigation approaches and the literature related to the management of knowledge.

Much of my critical reflection during the reconnaissance phase was supported by artefacts drawn from my past professional activities. The data used during the reconnaissance period can often be less convincing than the data collected and used later in the research project (McNiff et al., 2003).

Using McNiff's (2000) 8 stage plan as a review framework, by the commencement of the action research proper I had clearly:

- undertaken a preliminary review of my practice as an administrator (stage 1);
- identified an aspect to improve, the management of knowledge (stage 2); and
- imagined a way forward through using conversations (stage 3).

My activities related to stages 4-8 were less explicit but had still been undertaken.

As my investigations continued during the reconnaissance phase, and post confirmation, they evolved into the action research proper phase with clear intentions and outcomes and the commencement of the more rigorous stages of the research. This phase more clearly reflected McNiff's (2000) 8 stages of action research. In the following section I discuss the action research proper phase in more detail.

### *3.4.2 Action research proper*

The period post doctoral confirmation, or the phase that I refer to as the action research proper, saw the commencement of a more rigorous and structured phase of my investigations. The central focus of this phase was the critical examination of my professional practice through the framework of knowledge management.

Progressing into the action research proper and trying it out (stage 4) was based upon the collection of information and evidence specifically related to my professional practice linked to the creation and management of knowledge within the school. Data was gathered through a process of dialogue with critical friends and through structured conversations with a diversity of my peers positioned within various

organisational scenarios. From this data evidence was drawn. It is important that the use of the terms data and evidence is clearly understood. Whitehead (2003, p.2) suggests that data is the information collected during an enquiry while evidence is data used to support or refute a belief, assertion, hypothesis or claim to knowledge.

Critical reflection was central to taking stock of what had happened (stage 5) and determining modifications to the plan in light of what had happened (stage 6).

As indicated previously, conversations were central to the methodology employed in the action research proper phase of this investigation. Conversations and the associated participation in relating and conversing have been identified in chapter 2 as being central to the emergence of knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Stacey, 2000). Conversations were primarily undertaken with:

- my critical friends;
- groups that I worked with in three different workplace scenarios which are referred to as scenario groups; and
- a teacher who demonstrated a significant influence on knowledge creation within the organisation through his position as a union representative. In the following chapters analysis of conversations with this teacher was placed within discussions linked to the scenario groups.

There were significant differences in the nature of the conversations undertaken with my critical friends and the nature of the conversations undertaken with scenario groups and individuals. The critical friend conversations were ongoing and evolutionary in nature and focused on:

- the development and refinement of the research methodology;
- the broader issues associated with knowledge management; and
- my professional practice as an administrator.

The critical friend conversations are better defined as dialogue because they adopted a more sustained inquiry into the processes, assumptions and certainties of my everyday professional practice (Isaacs, 1994; Schein, 1993). Whereas the scenario conversations were each centred on one primary conversation and they were not

ongoing. For each type of conversation I applied a standard and systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data.

In the following section I have provided a summary of the data collection and analysis processes adopted in my investigations.

### *3.4.3 Critical friends*

In this section I provide a clarification of the concept and role of critical friends within the context of this research. The term critical friend is often used within the broad context of action research and appears to be subject to a range of interpretations. I have used critical friend as a term to describe someone who helps others find the limits of the ways that they are thinking (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The role of critical friends was more to ask questions than to provide answers. Critical friends stimulated discussions through questioning and conversation. The questions were to make me recognise my underlying assumptions or worldviews and to prepare me for future action and change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

From the outset of this research project there was an alignment between my critical friends' conceptualisation of their practical role in the research project and the theory linked to their role. The alignment was clearly indicated in the first meeting with my critical friends (critical friends, 20/05/2004) where it was agreed that the role of critical friends was to:

- ask clarifying and contributing questions;
- provide advice about the application of my investigations within the school;  
and
- assist me in clarifying my thinking.

With this role in mind, dialogue with my critical friends was integral to both the later part of the reconnaissance phase and the action research proper phase of the project.

After the introductory conversations the critical friend conversations developed the following framework.

- They ranged in length from 60 to 90 minutes dependent on the availability of the individuals and the nature of the topics discussed.
- A transcript of any previous conversation was provided prior to a new conversation.
- A very broad agenda was provided prior to the conversation.
- At the commencement of the conversation the transcript of the previous conversation and the conversation concept map were authenticated by the critical friends (Concept maps are discussed in more detail in Section 3.4.5).
- Actions agreed to during the previous conversation were revisited.
- Research methodology issues were continuously revisited and refined.
- Issues related to the broad topic of knowledge management were discussed.

The methodology for recording and transcribing the conversations was refined during the early critical friend conversations. Nearly all conversations were recorded on audio tape and later transcribed to serve as a primary data source. The process of full transcription of each conversation evolved from written summary notes, to summaries derived from micro cassette recordings, to the transcription of tapes recorded on professional recording equipment. In all cases, except for the first two critical friend conversations, the transcripts were a complete record of the conversation. In the earlier stages of this process I transcribed the audiotapes of the conversations. However the transcription proved to be extremely time consuming and created delays between the original conversation and the subsequent authentication of the conversation transcript and analysis by the group members. During the life of the research I successfully applied for financial assistance to fund the cost of Pacific Outsourcing Solutions completing the transcription. Partial funding was received to support the transcription. Copies of the conversation transcripts are available from the author upon request.

#### *3.4.4 Scenario Groups*

In this section I outline how I gathered data and analysed the information to provide evidence to support any claims about my professional practice. The evidence was drawn from conversations with the members of groups and an individual teacher who

were working in various scenarios (particular situations) within the school. Working with the different scenario groups embraced stages 4 and 5 of McNiff's (2000) model, that is, trying it out and taking stock of what happens. In the following sections I use the term scenario group conversations to also include the conversations undertaken with an individual.

In the first cycle of the action research proper phase, my professional practice was critically examined through my involvement with four workplace scenarios. Each scenario had linkages to different groups or activities within the school. Each scenario provided the opportunity for people positioned within different relationship contexts with the school to critique my practice as an administrator. The selection of 4 very different scenario groups specifically addressed the issue of multiple realities of my professional practice. In addressing this issue scenarios were chosen to ensure diversity in the following ways:

- my power relationship within the group;
- mix of organisational members; and
- specific organisational context.

The four scenarios that I worked with were as follows.

- **Scenario 1:** I was positioned as the chairman of a cross sectoral group comprising, Heads of Department, Guidance Officer and teachers. The focus of the group was the support of students in years 10 to 12 who were identified as being 'at educational risk'. The group had worked to develop and implement processes that generate and use knowledge related to the target student group. The knowledge context was the collaborative generation and use of knowledge directly related to students at risk.
- **Scenario 2:** I was positioned as a member of the school's executive management team working specifically within the context of knowledge creation and management. The management team involved in the research were the Principal and the 3 Deputy Principals. The team was responsible for the development, prioritisation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the key organisational processes. The knowledge contexts were the whole of

organisation strategic processes and the diversity of operational tasks specifically related to the Senior School.

- **Scenario 3:** I was positioned as the member of the executive team with the management responsibility for one sector of the school's middle management team. The group comprised the 8 Heads of Department responsible for the management of curriculum delivery to students in years 8 to 12. The knowledge context was the operational issues related to the Senior School.
- **Scenario 4:** I was positioned as a practitioner researcher in conversation with an experienced teacher and school union representative. The knowledge context was the development of an understanding of the individual's worldviews on a diversity of issues.

Central to my work with the scenario groups was my previous assertion that in action research the research problem is often pursued through a wandering route and data sources are found along the way. The conversations with scenario members were a method of collecting live evidence, from people on whom my professional practice impacts, about how my practices have influenced the quality of their lives (McNiff, 2000). The data collection techniques employed within these conversations were responsive to the individual scenarios. Within each scenario the members collaboratively refined the most appropriate data collection processes giving rise to some variations in the data collection processes between each scenario group.

Broadly speaking the scenario group conversations allowed participants to:

- critique my professional performance as an educational administrator particularly within the context of knowledge management; and
- discuss issues linked to knowledge creation and management within the school.

The scenario group conversations were undertaken in two stages:

- data collection stage; and
- analysis authentication stage.

The data collection stage of the scenario conversations normally mirrored the framework as follows.

- They ranged in length from 60 to 90 minutes dependent on the availability of the individuals and topics discussed.
- Group members were provided with the ethics consent form, the project information sheet, which are available from the author upon request) and the scenario group survey (Appendix 1).
- The research topic was outlined and definitions for key terms applied to the research were provided.
- The scenario group survey was used as a loose framework for the conversation.
- The scenario group survey was completed.

At this point it is important to clarify for the reader, the development and role of the scenario group survey. The survey (Appendix 1) was developed as an outcome from my critical friend conversations. It was designed in collaboration with my critical friends whose involvement is outlined in chapter 5. The primary role of the scenario group survey was to provide a stimulus and possible framework for the scenario group conversations. The survey questions served to focus the minds of the conversation participants on my knowledge management practice rather than just knowledge management. The tabulation of the scenario group survey responses was of secondary importance in providing indicators of areas of strengths and weaknesses in my professional practice within the context of knowledge management.

In developing the scenario group survey I was forced to make clear statements of behavioural indicators of my professional practice. The survey drew upon the knowledge management discourse to identify six areas of professional practice related to knowledge management. The survey used a five point scale to allow individuals to indicate their opinion of my performance against each of the identified areas of practice. To support individuals in developing an opinion a number of examples of my behaviour for each of the areas of practice were provided.

Making explicit the criteria and standards of judgement that I employed in the generation of evidence used to support my claims to knowledge was important in guaranteeing the integrity of my research (Mc Niff, pers. comm., 2005).

#### *3.4.5 Data analysis and truth*

At the heart of this action research project were the issues associated with developing mutual understanding around the conversations that occurred. One challenge for this project as for all action research projects was the authenticity of the analysis of the collected information and the truthfulness of the subsequent generation of knowledge. Using the visual format of concept mapping to represent knowledge allowed the researcher and participants to gain an overview of the issues raised in the various conversations. Jonassen and Grabowski (1993) suggested that the visual representation in concept maps had several advantages:

- minimum use of text made it easy to scan for a word, phrase, or the general idea; and
- visual representation allowed for the development of a holistic understanding that words alone cannot convey.

Because the nodes of the concept maps contained only a keyword or phrase, more interpretation by the researcher was required (Jonassen & Grabowski, 1993). This section provides an overview of the processes that I used to support the interpretation of the conversational concept maps.

The conversation transcripts were used as the data source from which evidence was developed. To support my making sense of the conversations I developed a standard routine in analysing the transcripts. The elements of the routine were:

- identification of the main issue/s of each section of the conversation transcript;
- using the identified main issues to develop a conversational concept map;
- using the concept map framework to support the development of my written narrative;

- distinguishing between the descriptive and reflective sections of the narrative; and
- written reflections on the literature that affirmed and disaffirmed the evidence.

To identify the main ideas within the conversations I read the individual conversation transcripts and when a primary idea was apparent within a section or paragraph I noted the idea in the margins of the transcript pages. Using the 'Inspiration' software package the key ideas were then developed into individual concept maps which were identified as conversational concept maps. The concept maps were individually identified using a system where each map was identified by group name, date and number.

In some conversations, as detailed in the relevant chapters, the conversational concept map was developed during the conversation by using a data projector. In these situations the use of a data projector allowed all group members to be actively involved in the construction of the concept map through the identification of key ideas and the exploration of relationships between the key ideas. Development of the concept maps during the conversation enhanced creativity within the group, supported the timely development of the concept maps and allowed easy authentication of the significant conversational issues. However it also led to disjointed conversations as I frequently became involved in conversations about linkages between key ideas with some group members while the rest of the group progressed the conversation in another direction risking the loss of data.

For purposes of authenticating transcript data used as evidence the source of each conversation quote used within the narrative was identified. To maintain confidentiality in critical friend conversations each critical friend was allocated a number, dating each conversation and noting the relevant page. Whereas in scenario group conversations no attempt was made to identify individual speakers and referencing was achieved by dating each conversation and numbering each page.

To identify similarities and differences between each of the scenario group conversations the conversational concept maps were then analysed. I searched for patterns within the concept maps. During this particular process I started to become

aware of the potential applicability to my research of Snowden's (2002b) work on knowledge management. From Snowden's work I drew upon the filters of context, need and relationships as organisers for the analysis of the conversational concept maps. From this analysis process evolved a single concept map identified as the summary concept map.

During the analysis process employed to develop the individual conversation and summary concept maps I was aware of the potentially biasing influence of my hermeneutic ontology and epistemology of practice. To reduce the biasing influence of these worldviews and to authenticate my analysis of the initial conversations, an authentication conversation was held with each group or individual. Prior to the authentication conversations I made my analysis of the individual conversation, including conversational concept map, available to the relevant conversation participants. Group members were then able to respond to and/or confirm the authenticity of my analysis of their conversation. At the authentication conversation the specific conversational context maps were shared with the relevant group. The use of a data projector enabled all members to be involved in discussions about my interpretation of the relevant conversations. During this conversation, changes were made to the individual conversational concept maps. If agreement could be reached on the redrafted concept maps these maps were then taken as endorsed by group members. If there were a range of interpretations these multiple variations were identified on the concept maps.

#### *3.4.6 Summary concept map conversation*

In cycle 2 of the action research another conversation was held with each scenario group. In a manner similar to the process used to authenticate the individual conversational concept maps the common theme or summary concept map was shared with each group. The sharing of the summary concept map was to stimulate discussion that affirmed or challenged the conceptual framework of the summary and associated linkages. The conversations were recorded on audio tape and transcribed. Feedback from scenario group members was used to develop unique versions of the summary concept map. The process reflected McNiff's (2000, p.199) view that through individual researchers asking questions about how to improve their own

practice, living theory action research becomes a way of doing research that generates a theory for living. From the individual summary concept maps a single model, reflecting my theory for living, was then developed. The process used is described in more detail in later chapters.

As a guide to the reader, in chapters 5, 6 and 7 the data collected from my conversations is analysed and where appropriate, some initial reflections are provided based upon evidence in the light of other researchers' published findings. Later, in chapter 8, I reflect in more depth upon my research findings, discuss the learnings from my study and provide critical comments on the personal theory of living that is articulated in my professional practice.

Central to chapters 5, 6 and 7 was the cyclical movement between action and reflection sometimes referred to as a Hermeneutic spiral (Gummesson, 1991). In this process action generated reflection and reflection influenced new action (McNiff, 2000) fuelling a cyclical movement between preunderstanding and understanding and the development of new learning. The process is at the heart of knowledge creation (McNiff, 2000). Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have been written to capture my progression through the Hermeneutic spiral rather than been written at an end point in the research and looking back.

The analysis is presented in these discrete chapters because the critical friend conversations had a greater focus on planning and methodology issues than the scenario groups. The critical friend conversations were ongoing and organic compared with the point in time scenario group conversations. I was a more active participant in the critical friend conversations compared with the scenario group conversations where my role was more as facilitator.

### 3.5 ETHICAL ISSUES

This section touches on some of the ethical issues associated with action research and addresses the concerns identified by Zeni (1998) that when administrators are studying their own practice, many of the traditional research guidelines collapse.

### *3.5.1 Ethical issues raised by the research problem and design.*

When exploring the ethical issues underpinning action research, Hall (1996) suggests that there is a basic epistemological position, which is supported by the following range of assumptions about knowledge construction.

- Evidence is derived from authentic data (which resonates the life experience of the researched and researcher).
- Relations between researcher and research participants proceed in a democratic manner.
- The researcher's theory-laden view is not given privilege over the participants' views.

If these assumptions are accepted, the following broad ethical issues linked to action research fieldwork that must be addressed (Winter, 1996).

- Make sure that the relevant consultation has occurred, and that the principles guiding the work have been accepted in advance by all.
- All participants must be allowed to influence the work, and the wishes of those who do not wish to participate must be respected.
- The development of the work must remain visible and open to suggestions from others.
- Permission must be obtained before making observations or examining documents produced for other purposes.
- Descriptions of others' work and points of view must be negotiated with those concerned before being published.
- The researcher must accept responsibility for maintaining confidentiality.

Another risk to be considered is the issue of risk to the researcher. Anderson and Jones (2000) cite the work of Pignatelli (1994) and his discussion of an ethics of risk. Pignatelli suggests that the researcher can risk censure from the organisation, or they can risk complicating prior understandings of their effectiveness, priorities and status. The nature of risk appears to be personal and professional, private as well as public.

### *3.5.2 Ethical considerations required by Education Queensland.*

In line with Education Queensland policy pertaining to research undertaken on a single site, written clearance was provided by principal of the school to undertake the research project. The research project at that time was titled ‘Knowledge management and organisational learning within an educational context- can they really be managed?’ The authority for the research to be undertaken was pursuant to my adherence to the scope and processes identified in the research project information sheet. A copy of the signed letter is available from me upon request.

### *3.5.3 Ethical considerations required by the Queensland University of Technology.*

The ethical considerations of this research are based on the requirements for approval to undertake research involving Human Participants. As such any research undertaken must conform to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. Queensland University of Technology requires the submission to the University Human Research Ethics Committee of the completed documentation, ‘Application for approval to undertake research involving Human Participants’. The appropriate clearance has been obtained and is available from the author upon request.

## 3.6 SUMMARY

Chapter 3 argued that insider facilitated action research provided me with the capacity to investigate within my workplace and subsequently generate meaningful new knowledge valid to my workplace. The ultimate decision of research methodology was guided and influenced by the following criteria.

- The inherent focus of the professional doctorate, that is, investigation into my professional practice.
- The complex and chaotic nature of the context of my professional practice, that is, educational administration.
- The need for alignment between any chosen methodology and my personal ontology (hermeneutic) and epistemology (practice based).

In particular it was the final criterion and its need to combine an awareness of the potential existence of the multiple realities held by those associated with my practice that highlighted the potential of employing inductive forms of reflection and research in my investigations. A practitioner employing critical reflection is in effect a researcher into their own practice, developing and redeveloping personal theories cyclically, as a consequence of putting these theories, as they arise, into active practice and then reflecting on that practice and the learning that has taken place (McNiff, 2000). Such action supported the examination of unexamined assumptions and challenged my very selective view of the world (Bawden & Woog, 1998; Hall, 1996; Melrose, 1996).

Employing a living theory approach to action research allowed me to ask those reflective questions about 'how' to improve my professional practice within the context of knowledge management and provided evidence to support my answers. In refining my understanding of the approach I came to acknowledge that living theory was not just a formulaic approach to undertaking action research but rather 'a lived practice, not something only to be spoken about but also something to be done' (McNiff, 2000, p.199).

The research project had two distinct phases. They were:

- phase one – reconnaissance; and
- phase two - action research proper (2 cycles of action research).

In the reconnaissance phase I determined where I was at, what I hoped to achieve and how I thought that I would get there (Mc Niff et. al., 2003). Reconnaissance clarified the starting point in my 'real world situation' (McNiff et al., 2003, p.35). In the action research proper phase of this investigation conversations were central to the methodology employed. Conversations were primarily undertaken with:

- my critical friends; and
- scenario groups and one individual teacher.

The conversations were recorded and transcribed. Concept mapping was used as an analysis tool. The next chapter outlines the reconnaissance phase of my investigations.

## 4 PHASE 1 - RECONNAISSANCE

In chapter 3 I identified that this investigation was undertaken in 2 phases. They were:

- phase 1 – reconnaissance; and
- phase 2 - action research proper.

I argued that the reconnaissance phase of the action research process was a vital phase of the research. This chapter outlines the reconnaissance undertaken within the context of my practitioner research. The term reconnaissance is used to describe those activities in my research that allowed me to determine ‘where I was at, what I hoped to achieve and how I thought that I would get there’ (McNiff et al., 2003, p.35). Ultimately the activities within the reconnaissance phase of my research clarified ‘where I was starting from in my real world situation’ (McNiff et al., 2003, p.35).

It is also important to acknowledge that within the broad context of research, whatever the issue investigated, there will always be the investigator and the issue and individual researchers will investigate the same situation differently (ontology). Similarly within the narrower context of reconnaissance there needs to be an exploration of both the investigator and the situation. I have suggested that these two areas of investigation be referred to as:

- self reconnaissance- the exploration of the investigator’s beliefs and behaviours within the areas of leadership and management; and
- situational reconnaissance- the exploration of the research context, investigation approaches and the literature related to the management of knowledge.

Situated within the reconnaissance phase of this specific research project there were two distinct time periods within which cycles of action occurred. The periods were as follows.

- *The period prior to the commencement of my doctoral studies.* During this period there were a number of experiences within my professional life that acted as catalysts for my interest in exploring the broad research topic and

which ultimately led to my applying for a position of Deputy Principal. To support my reflection on the reconnaissance that occurred during this period I have drawn upon one significant artefact from this time, that is, the written application for my current position as Deputy Principal. This artefact, available from the author upon request, provides evidence of my worldviews and professional practice as at that point in time.

- *The period between the commencement of my doctoral studies and my confirmation.* Reconnaissance during this period involved the structured reading, reflection, planning, trialling of ideas and discussion of issues linked to organisational learning and the management of knowledge. It was through exposure to the writings of (McNiff et al., 2003) during this period that I became aware of the concept of reconnaissance as a stage of action research.

By the completion of my reconnaissance, and using McNiff's (2000) 8 stage plan for action research as a review framework, I had clearly:

- undertaken a preliminary review of my practice as an administrator (stage 1);
- identified the management of knowledge as an aspect of my practice to improve (stage 2); and
- tentatively imagined a way forward through using living theory action research (stage 3).

In the following section I have used an analysis framework embracing the two time periods and the exploration of self and situation to present my reconnaissance. The development of my awareness of the concept of reconnaissance late in the pre-confirmation phase of my research made the provision of evidence problematic as no evidence sources had been developed specifically for the purposes of reconnaissance. My reconnaissance was largely a retrospective activity drawing upon a range of artefacts and experiences from the reconnaissance period. From these artefacts I have drawn evidence to authenticate my statements about my developing thinking that occurred during reconnaissance. In some cases, to reinforce my claims, I have identified sections from these evidence sources and highlighted them as artefacts within this chapter.

Italicised writings within this chapter are my critical reflections added in 2005 as I reviewed and reconsidered my reconnaissance activities.

#### 4.1 PRE-COMMENCEMENT OF DOCTORAL STUDIES

A significant outcome of reconnaissance is the clarification of where I was starting from in my action research project (McNiff et al., 2003, p.35). I argue that my action research commenced in January 2001 when I commenced my doctoral studies rather than January 2003 when I had completed my doctoral confirmation and formal permission to commence my research was provided by the university. To identify where I was starting from in January 2001 I have drawn upon three specific events related to my professional life. The events were:

- my Master's study;
- a tragic event that occurred at a school where I was teaching; and
- my application for my current position as Deputy Principal.

I have examined each of these events from the perspective of self reconnaissance and situational reconnaissance.

##### 4.1.1 *My Master's study*

Between 1996 and 1999 I undertook post-graduate study toward the award of Master in Rural Management Studies.

##### Self reconnaissance

By 1999, at the completion of my Master's studies, I believed that the combination of practical achievement through my professional activities and a theoretical understanding through my studies had given me a balanced approach to leadership and management. My studies in areas including, Strategic Management, Managing People, Leadership Issues, Managing Change and Creative Management had forced me to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses in a diversity of areas associated with educational administration.

## Situational reconnaissance

Significantly the demands of Master's level study had forced me to write about my reflections using a rigorous quality framework. I came to accept that writing about my reflections was a very powerful learning experience, far more powerful than personal reflection or conversations with my professional peers. The requirements of formal study and research had proved to be a powerful learning process for me. The personal and professional growth that I achieved through my study encouraged me to consider the possibility of further study at some time in the future.

That period of my life between 1996 and 1999 was the first time that I had tried to clarify, in writing, the professional and personal forces influencing my life. At that stage I was aware of the professional doctorate as a logical progression from my master's study and that it could provide a framework for me to continue my study of management. Through the opportunity to blend theory and practice the design of the professional doctorate could support the continuous improvement of my professional practice (Schon, 1983).



*I can now see that my practice based epistemology was evident during those years of formal study. My practice based epistemology was also what supported my professional growth as teacher, manager and leader. Upon further reflection my theoretical construct of management was based upon the modernist discourses associated with knowledge management and organisational learning. I was not challenged to examine my professional practices through the lenses of power and coercion. I had not personally identified my epistemology and ontology, those central worldviews that underpinned my practice. The result was that I accepted a technical rationalist worldview of management as being the norm.*

### 4.1.2 Tragic event

During the period of my master's study and while working as a Head of Department in a regional high school, a teacher working at the school committed suicide. The suicide was linked to work related pressures. To that point my professional career had been marked by many learning experiences however the experiences associated

with the suicide have had the most significant and lasting impact upon my professional practice.

### Self reconnaissance

The response within the school to the teacher's death brought home to me the reality of multiple truths. Individually, teachers in the school needed answers to help them understand the death of a popular teacher. As information became available teachers increasingly sought to attribute blame on members of the school administration and as their need for answers grew so too did their desire to blame. I witnessed individuals interpreting actions and statements in extremely contrasting ways. The contrasting interpretations saw the staff fracturing into opposing factions with their individual reality of specific events closely aligned to the different factions. The result was that two people could listen to the same conversation and come away with significantly different interpretations and realities derived from the conversation. The different realities then served as fuel for further conflict within the organisation. Intervention from external consultants had little influence on the associated conflict within the school.

From this personal experience was born a quote that I frequently used, 'perception is reality'. I came to a realisation that no matter what I believed to be the truth of a particular event it was the perception of other individuals that determined their reality of the specific event and their determination of the related truth. As a manager I was challenged in my thinking about how does a manager know if they are 'walking their talk' as opposed to 'perceiving that they are walking their talk'. I came to realise the necessity for a manager to facilitate some form of routine evaluation and reality check of their professional practice.



*I did not realise it at the time but this experience was the catalyst for a change in my ontology with awareness and acceptance that there can be multiple interpretations of a single event and that often there is no single truth or reality. Aligned with this growing awareness of the role of perception came the realisation that one way to test my perceptions of my professional practice with the perceptions of my professional colleagues was through interacting with critical friends.*

## Situational reconnaissance

The events following the suicide proved to be a powerful learning experience for me and one that motivated me to want to better understand organisational behaviour. For my own healing I needed to make sense of what I had endured and whether it could have been managed better for all concerned. The need to understand was a significant personal motivation to commence doctoral studies. And it was the need to understand whether different professional practices by administrators may have prevented the tragedy or minimised its impact that motivated me to explore the potential of a professional doctorate.

### *4.1.3 Application for position as Deputy Principal*

As evidence of the leadership and management worldviews that I held immediately prior to the commencement of my doctoral studies I have used the job application I submitted in February 2000 for my current position as Deputy Principal. The application, written approximately ten months prior to the commencement of my doctoral studies, provided valuable evidence of my thinking about leadership and management at that point in time. In the application, which is available upon request from the author, I was required to address the following selection criteria (SC).

SC 1. Capacity for leadership in education within the context of Education Queensland's strategic plan.

SC2. Capacity for effective management to optimise the achievement of agreed goals.

SC3. Capacity for developing effective interpersonal relationships and establishing productive partnerships.

SC4. Capacity for leading and managing change within the educational environment.

SC5. Capacity for providing consistent quality education outcomes for every student.

In addressing these selection criteria I was forced to articulate my beliefs related to areas of my professional practice and provide evidence to substantiate these belief statements. My beliefs at that time were strongly influenced by my Master's level study as discussed earlier in this chapter. The timing of the application, prior to the commencement of my doctoral studies, was significant because it could demonstrate

that my thinking had not been influenced by any learnings associated with my doctoral studies.

#### Situational reconnaissance

In my response to SC4 I outlined my approach to facilitating learning by describing what I understood to be a learning organisation within the context of a school. I had initially heard of the term learning organisation while completing an assignment during my master's study. I was introduced to Senge's (1990) conceptualisation of the learning organisation but I had not studied the philosophy of this term in depth.

At the same time in my role as manager of several national and state curriculum projects (job application, p. 2) I conceptualised a practical application of the learning organisation and developed the opinion that as a group of professionals we were most productive and effective when working together and learning our way through a new project. The concept of the learning organisation started to have relevance in my professional activities and I embraced Senge's (1990) discourse as evidenced in the following statement (job application, p.15),

'As a school seeks to become a learning organisation a decision must be made to change the focus from using people to build a great school to using the school to build great people. When this happens the organisation becomes one that learns continuously and transforms itself. This learning occurs continuously and strategically and results in changes in knowledge, beliefs and behaviours'.

#### Self reconnaissance

As a Head of Department attempting to embrace these philosophies, my approach to leadership started to reflect the practice of an administrator who was willing to take some risks and invite new behaviours in my teaching colleagues. One example was that instead of concentrating decision making power in me, I sought to decentralise decision making and supported my staff to make decisions and take action regarding work responsibilities. My approach to leadership was driven by a powerful belief that developing and maintaining organisational effectiveness was directly linked to

supporting open communication and quality workplace relationships (job application, p.5).

*Upon reflection I had not critically examined Senge's (1990) discourse and I had not challenged the practical reality of a learning organisation. In my master's study I had completed an assignment on the learning organisation and I had drawn upon my leadership experiences while working with groups of professionals on single focus projects and as an administrator managing a small curriculum department. In these contexts I was willing to embrace the rhetoric of the learning organisation and make broad statements such that 'this leadership approach will sustain ongoing growth within an organisation' (job application, p.15).*



*However even in my early days as a Deputy Principal working in a complex organisational situation I was starting to challenge these statements. It could be argued that an administrator actively embracing the worldview of the learning organisation could be conveniently ignoring the coercive behaviours being employed to achieve organisational outcomes. The realisation of my willingness to uncritically accept a range of management discourses increased my awareness of the necessity that any research approach that I employed should inherently have me critically examining my practice and challenging the notion of management fads.*

In my job application (job application, p.5) I used the learning organisation discourse as a construct to make a statement about my approach to leadership. I characterised my approach to leadership as working with people and supporting them to achieve personal and organisational goals. I indicated that I achieved this through:

- developing a personal **vision**;
- **testing** this vision against the needs and beliefs of the other members of the organisation;
- **researching** how other organisations have achieved a similar outcome;
- determining the level of **support** for the product/process;
- **collaboratively developing** strategies to achieve this product/process;
- **engaging** team members to achieve the shared vision; and
- **evaluating** the effectiveness and costs of the process.

By that stage of my career I had identified that the building of relationships had a significant influence on my effectiveness as a leader. My understanding was drawn from reflecting on relevant theory and my practice within the context of formal and informal learning experiences. The theory was predominantly based on a range of modernist discourses drawn from formal research literature and populist management literature. While I may have identified the importance of relationships my personal reflections suggest that as an administrator I developed these relationships and worked with people solely to further my needs to achieve my vision. I was unknowingly demonstrating coercive behaviour. It was during this period that I started to question myself about the longer term sustainability of particular change initiatives that I had championed. I considered that many initiatives were relatively easy to implement in a school but the ultimate test was whether the initiative could be sustained in the organisation if the initiator or champion left the organisation.

In February 2000 I perceived myself as a leader and manager who linked the achievement of organisational outcomes to the development of quality working relationships built on effective communication (job application, p.12). I had identified that in the communication process a person evaluates what is heard based on their opinion of the sender or how much they trust the sender. Subsequently when trust is low and people are angry, no matter what message the sender actually expresses, it is likely to be distorted. When trust is lost in a relationship, all messages tend to be reframed in a negative way and that hostility makes it most difficult to send and receive accurate information. My managerial successes were based upon my ability to network with a cross section of stakeholders and build good working relationships. I have listed a range of those skills which allowed me to effectively network (job application, p.8).



*In the list of management skills I had unknowing brought together, communication, trust and relationships as factors influencing the effectiveness of leadership. I had specifically identified the importance of these three factors within the context of the need for me as a manager to achieve outcomes. I believed that of these factors a personal strength was my ability to develop productive relationships. At that stage I had unknowingly identified the significance of clearly identifying need when seeking to achieve an outcome. It was four years later, within my formal research, that I*

*became aware of Snowden's (2002b) identification of the importance of need and relationships in the process of knowledge management.*

#### *4.1.4 Summary of unintentional reconnaissance*

It was vital to my research to acknowledge that significant unintentional reconnaissance had occurred in the period prior to my doctoral studies. It was challenging for me to identify where I was at when I commenced my research. I brought to my doctoral studies a range of beliefs related to my leadership and management practices that reflected my ontology and epistemology at that stage of my life. Central beliefs were that:

- there are multiple truths;
- I cannot be an effective leader until I truly understand myself;
- the ultimate challenges for a manager are firstly that they must 'walk their talk' and then to be sure that 'they truly are walking it';
- relationships are vital when working with people;
- my most effective professional growth comes through a learning process where theory supports reflection on my practice; and
- formal study and research are powerful professional learning tools.

A significant question for me was how does a manager know if they are walking their talk as opposed to perceiving that they are walking their talk? The potential of critical friends providing a reality check of my professional practice became apparent.

## 4.2 POST-COMMENCEMENT OF DOCTORAL STUDIES

In this section I have highlighted the development that occurred in my thinking during the reconnaissance between the commencement of my doctoral studies and the formal confirmation of my research proposal (January 2001-November 2003). The commencement of my doctoral studies meant that a very broad situation had been identified for investigation and consequently situational reconnaissance figured prominently as by definition there was a focused exploration of the research context, investigation approaches and related literature.

A significant aspect of the reconnaissance during the post-commencement phase of my doctoral studies was the review of the literature related to the discourses of organisational learning and knowledge management as well as the literature related to methods of investigating the associated management practices. During this period the forced reflection associated with the development of my literature review was one of the major catalysts for changes in my thinking. These changes are evidenced in a range of artefacts produced during the 3 year period leading to the development of the formal confirmation document. My evidence sources were the following documents created during that period:

- coursework assignment (Dillon, March, 2001)
- coursework assignment (Dillon, June, 2001);
- course presentation (Dillon, January, 2002);
- draft confirmation document (Dillon, June, 2002); and
- confirmation document (Dillon, November, 2002).

These documents are available from the author upon request.

#### *4.2.1 Coursework assignment (March, 2001)*

##### Situational reconnaissance

At the commencement of the formal reconnaissance phase my research thinking was focused upon organisational learning rather than learning organisations as identified in the period prior to the formal commencement of my studies. The focus on organisational learning is evidenced in artefact 1, the executive summary of my first coursework assignment. The summary presented my perspective, at that point, on school leadership and organisational learning. The perspective expressed reflected a dominant technical rationalist worldview, as discussed in chapter 2. Associated with this worldview was the belief that organisations should be rational systems that operate as efficiently as possible (Mc Niff, 2000). This belief was evidenced in statements taken from artefact 1, 'in order to be more flexible, efficient or effective in meeting organisational goals' and 'teachers will have more incentive to enhance their capabilities and deliver improved educational outcomes'.



*At that point there was no evidence of my being critical of the modernist management discourse.*

### **Artefact 1. Executive summary from assignment, March 2001.**

The capacity for organisations to reflect on and learn from their practices in order to be more flexible, efficient or effective in meeting organisational goals, has emerged as a central feature of organisational and management theory.

This is being translated to the context of educational change and reform. An image of schools as professional learning communities holds considerable promise as a response to the challenges facing education now and in the near future. School leadership that facilitates and promotes involvement and individual initiative will be the order of the day. Ideally teachers will have more incentive to enhance their capabilities and deliver improved educational outcomes for students through the organisational learning processes of the school.

#### *4.2.2 Coursework assignment (June, 2001)*

##### Situational reconnaissance

As I have discussed in chapter 1, soon after commencing my position as Deputy Principal in July 2000, I began to be personally challenged by the effectiveness of the organisation's use of its information and knowledge resources embedded within its extensive organisational systems. I first formally acknowledge these concerns in a coursework assignment in June (2001) as highlighted in artefact 2. My concern was grounded in a belief that a number of the warning signs existed within the organisation. My strength of conviction about how these resources were used originated from my master's study.

In short, many of the behaviours that had surfaced in my previous school after the suicide event were evident in this school. The tensions that came from individual's varying interpretations of reality simmered and occasionally boiled over within the school. My need for personal understanding of what was happening resurfaced. I wanted to better understand how my professional practices as a Deputy Principal could or should influence these happenings.

## Artefact 2. Assignment 2, Interdisciplinary Studies in Education, June 2001.

Warning signs were evident within the organisation (Stewart, 1997). These signs included:

- Failure to use already available knowledge
- Withholding important knowledge because of mistrust or conflicts between groups
- Holding discussions from which key people were missing
- Failure to take heed of important information.

### Self reconnaissance

By June 2001 I had framed the research problem as ‘Knowledge creation and organisational learning- another educational fad?’ Artefact 3, the executive summary from a coursework assignment, highlights the change in my thinking that occurred in the months since March. I had introduced the concept of knowledge creation and started to identify the context in which leaders were seeking to develop flexibility and efficiency. I had also broadly identified the influence of relationships on professional learning. My uncritical acceptance of the management discourse is indicated in my statement, ‘it is relatively easy to visualise the considerable promise that schools operating as professional learning communities holds as a potential response to the challenges facing education now and in the near future’. Writing in the third person spoke as if I was situated outside the research context and positioned me as an external researcher.



*Upon reflection being situated as an insider researcher requires my writing to reflect this positioning by speaking in the first person. There was little evidence of critical thinking about the issues related to organisational learning. I accepted the modernist management discourse and I had not challenged the reality of the discourse. I had unwittingly accepted an apparently simplistic solution to the diversity of challenges confronting Queensland State Secondary Schools.*

### **Artefact 3. Assignment 2, Interdisciplinary Studies in Education, June 2001.**

#### Executive Summary

The capacity for organisations to reflect on and learn from their practices in order to be more flexible, efficient or effective in meeting organisational goals, has emerged as a central feature of organisational and management theory. This is being translated to the context of educational change and reform.

If it is accepted that Queensland State Secondary Schools have until recently been characterised by:

- \*Bureaucratic structures
- \*Authoritarian leadership and unilateral decision making
- \*A treadmill of ceaseless innovation demanding incessant learning of the new
- \*Teachers and administrators not able or not willing to examine their own practice publicly
- \*Teachers operating in isolation and individualism

Then, it is relatively easy to visualise the considerable promise that schools operating as professional learning communities holds as a potential response to the challenges facing education now and in the near future. Learning communities where school leadership will facilitate and promote involvement and initiative in individual teachers. Ideally, learning communities that provide more incentives for teachers to enhance their capabilities and achieve improved educational outcomes for students through the organisational learning processes of the school.

#### *4.2.3 Course presentation (January, 2002)*

By January 2002 my thinking had developed and allowed me to see a potential relationship between organisational learning and knowledge management. I had also positioned my research within the context of an anticipated major organisational change within the school with the impending retirement of a long serving principal. Artefact 4 was a segment of a presentation that I delivered in January 2002. It identified the possible linkage between knowledge management and organisational learning and suggested possible questions arising from this relationship. It also highlighted that the primary reason for undertaking the research was the enhancement of my understanding about organisational learning and knowledge management.

#### **Artefact 4. Course presentation, January 2002.**

##### **Topic**

Knowledge management strategies in preparation for a leadership transition - a catalyst for organisational learning?

##### **Potential 'Broad' Questions.**

Underpinning the issues related to the 'transfer of corporate knowledge' are several potential questions that could be explored:

1. What organisational factors stimulate or inhibit knowledge diffusion or organisational learning?
2. What changes in organisational learning follow from knowledge management activities?
3. How can changes in organisational knowledge or learning be measured?

##### **Why Research**

- Primarily, it is to increase my understanding of organisational learning and knowledge management. Potential for personal and professional benefits.
- Secondly, potential for the research process to act as a catalyst and provide benefits for the organisation. A significant benefit may be a direct impact on practice through:
  - Better understanding the transfer process through which individual learning and knowledge (worldviews) become embedded in an organisation's memory and structure.
  - Leading to lasting and significant organisational learning i.e. learning independent of the memory, motivation and action of those originally involved.



*In examining how I presented the topic and the sub-questions I continued to be positioned as an external researcher. My narrative still reflected an endorsement of the modernist view of management. Terms used such as, transfer, stimulate, change and measure, resonated with a modernist view of management and an endorsement of a technical rationalist worldview of management. My personal narrative continued to articulate the view that I could manage or control knowledge learning.*

#### 4.2.4 Draft confirmation document (June, 2002)

##### Self reconnaissance

By June 2002 while still exploring the linkage between knowledge management and organisational learning I had started to question the modernist discourse. The following statements taken from Artefact 5, part of my draft confirmation document, provide evidence of this questioning; ‘there is a presumption here, that the basic goals and values of the organisation will not be challenged in this process of organisational learning or if they are, management sanctions them’ and ‘paradoxically, cultural change in organisations typically demands levels of cognitive redefinition that can only be achieved by some version of coercive persuasion’. I had identified the need to critically test that part of the organisational learning and knowledge management discourses that offered managers solutions to enable employees to find better and better ways to meet organisational goals. I had become conscious of the potentially coercive role of the knowledge manager.

##### **Artefact 5. Draft Confirmation, June 2002.**

*What is the principal research question?*

This research seeks to develop an opinion on whether knowledge management initiatives can act as a catalyst for organisational learning in secondary schools. The research will explore the use of data and information collected within the context of a school and the subsequent processes adopted by school management to develop information and knowledge for use within the organisation.

This research will also test the reality of the strategic view of organisational learning. This view is that as individuals and organisations become engaged with knowledge management, they will learn to keep up with, or be ahead of the pace of change and will construct themselves as learning organisations (Edwards & Usher, 2001). The hope is that the workforce at all levels will ‘think’ change and have a positive attitude toward change and be prepared to accept change (du Gay, 1996). Ultimately the hope is that employees will find better and better ways to meet organisational goals (Schein, 1999). There is a presumption here, that the basic goals and values of the organisation will not be challenged in this process of organisational learning or if they are, management sanctions them. Schein (1999) argues that this effort to empower people, to make them generative learners so that the organisation can become more productive and creative is typically described as ‘cultural change’. Paradoxically, cultural change in organisations typically demands levels of cognitive redefinition that can only be achieved by some version of coercive persuasion.

#### 4.2.5 Confirmation document (November, 2002)

##### Situational reconnaissance

By November 2003 my research topic had evolved to, 'An educational administrator's attempts to adopt knowledge management practices within their workplace'. Artefact 6 provides further evidence that I had started to see the need to adopt a more critical approach to the investigation of knowledge management and organisational learning. I had started to discuss how as an administrator I could model knowledge management principles rather than simply do knowledge management. In so doing my research examines both the organisational and professional impacts of an administrator adopting knowledge management principles within the context of a school restructuring process.

##### **Artefact 6. The research question from confirmation document, November 2003.**

This research will examine the organisational, professional and personal impacts of an administrator adopting knowledge management principles within the context of a major school re-structure. In undertaking this examination, the research will test, among other things, the reality of the modernist management narrative suggestion that, as individuals and organisations become engaged with knowledge management, the workforce at all levels will think change and have a positive attitude toward change and be prepared to accept change (du Gay, 1996) and that ultimately employees will find better ways to meet organisational goals (Schein, 1999).

It is important to note that by adopting an action research methodology in this project it is not possible to predetermine what sub-questions may develop throughout the life of the research project. However there are a number of other areas that potentially could be explored within the broader focus of the research. Three of these areas are:

1. To what extent the implementation of these management strategies is de facto coercive persuasion?
2. What role does dialogue play in the knowledge management and organisational learning processes?
3. Could organisational learning and knowledge management be similar theoretical constructs developed around different discourses?

Artefacts 6 and 7 clearly define the situation from which I moved forward into my formal research period. Artefact 7 particularly highlights the role of reflection on my professional practice.

### **Artefact 7. Confirmation document, November 2003.**

The focus of the research was identified as being the reflection on the professional practice of an educational administrator who is consciously trying to employ knowledge management principles to support a major organisational restructuring. It was argued that the research was significant because it examines knowledge management and organisational learning through the lens of the personal practical worldview of management rather than the dominant technical rationalist worldview of modernist management.

#### Self reconnaissance

Significantly by this stage I had come to acknowledge that I could bring to my research a personal practical worldview of management as an alternative to the technical rationalist worldview of knowledge management most frequently represented through the modernist management discourse. Artefact 7 explicitly identifies the movement to this alternative lens.

#### *4.2.6 Summary*

By the completion of the post-commencement phase, changes had occurred in how I defined the research question and consequently how to research the question. I had moved from acting as an external researcher operating within my workplace, to being an insider researcher critically examining my practice in my workplace. I came to accept the reality that any plan in action research should be viewed as only a broad plan (McNiff, 2000) and as such a researcher doesn't have to select a chosen research methodology from the start (Whitehead, 2003). I had determined that the living theory approach to action research would support the critical investigation of my practice.

Significantly in the three year period between 2001 and 2003, I had become more embedded into my position as Deputy Principal and into the machinations of the organisation. I developed relationships with individuals and groups which would allow me to approach potential critical friends and participant scenario groups. I became even more aware of organisational issues related to the use of information and the creation of knowledge. I had developed my capacity to act as an investigator into my own professional practices.

By the completion of my cycles of intentional and unintentional reconnaissance I had touched upon all of the outcomes of reconnaissance as defined by McNiff et al. (2003). I had determined where I was at both professionally and personally, what I hoped to achieve through my research and how I thought that I would get there. I was committed to using my enrolment in a professional doctorate as a vehicle to critically investigate my professional practice as an administrator. I had determined that I would use a living theory approach to action research to understand the how of my practice. In line with my action research approach I decided to have discussions with critical friends and this subsequently led to holding conversations with three scenario groups and an individual teacher within the organisation. The rationale for this choice is elaborated in the next chapter as it emerged from my conversations with my critical friends.

## 5 PHASE 2 - CRITICAL FRIENDS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 outlined the data collection and analysis procedures employed. For phase 2 of my investigations I identified two major data sources:

- transcripts of conversations with my critical friends; and
- transcripts of conversations held with scenario groups and individual organisational members.

This chapter is developed around a critical analysis of the critical friend conversations. In the chapter 6 the cycle 1 scenario group conversations are analysed and in chapter 7 the cycle 2 scenario group conversations are analysed. To support the analysis of the conversations I have used concept maps to develop summaries of the individual conversations. The concept maps are embedded within chapters 5, 6 and 7 and they support the reader's understanding of my analysis by providing a brief summary of the major issues discussed and indicate linkages between these issues.

Within chapters 5, 6 and 7 I have also identified relevant theoretical perspectives and made reflective comments when key issues were affirmed or challenged by the broader literature. Reflections are interspersed through each chapter and have been distinguished from the actual data analysis by using italic script. The variation of fonts is one writing strategy that I have employed to challenge the impression of linearity conveyed by many research dissertations. In reality my research occurred in a convoluted fashion. My learnings occurred at different stages of my research and at different depths. Italicising fonts identifies the multi-layering of my research; it allows me to go deeper in my thinking at that point in time.

### 5.2 CRITICAL FRIEND CONVERSATIONS

In this section I analyse each of the conversations that I had with my critical friends. In chapter 3 critical friends were defined as individuals who help others find the limits of the ways that they are thinking (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). My critical

friends were 2 members of staff, one a teacher and the other a project manager. Their role was to stimulate discussions through questioning and conversation. Key outcomes from the conversations were that I was made aware of my underlying assumptions and I was more prepared for future research action and change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The critical friend conversations were not held at regular intervals but were undertaken as need dictated and time allowed.

In summary, the critical friend conversations helped me to clarify my exact area of investigation, my approach to this investigation and provided the opportunities for professional dialogue. This professional dialogue supported reflection and clarification of my theoretical and practical understanding of knowledge and its creation.

### *5.2.1 Background*

In the period between commencing my doctoral studies and my formal research confirmation I held a number of informal research discussions with my peers. Even with these discussions my informal practitioner researcher journey during this period was lonely and lacked clarity. I was unable to progress my research because of my continuously changing thinking about the broad topic of knowledge management and because of significant policy and staffing changes within my own workplace.

As my thinking about the knowledge management discourse became clearer and my confidence in my understanding of working in an action research methodology grew, my need for a 'research sounding board', distinct from my academic supervisors, crystallised. The 'sounding board' became my critical friends. In seeking professional colleagues to act in this critical capacity I required individuals who:

- possessed insight and the capacity to reflect;
- would not be intimidated by my management position with its associated power;
- would be confident in providing personal critique of me;
- had professional credibility;
- brought different perspectives of the organisation to our conversations;

- would be prepared to sacrifice their time for our conversations; and
- I could trust to maintain confidentiality of issues raised in our discussions.

After working in the school for over 3 years I felt confident enough in my knowledge of the people in the organisation to approach 2 members of staff that I had worked with on separate activities and invite them to be my critical friends. Over the course of study I met with the critical friends on the following occasions; 20 May 2004, 10 June 2004, 9 August 2004, 30 August 2004, 2 November 2004 and 4 March 2005. The minutes or transcripts of these conversations are available from the author upon request. In the following sections I have analysed each of these conversations.

### 5.3 CRITICAL FRIEND CONVERSATION, 20 MAY 2004

I met for an initial discussion with my two potential critical friends on the 20 May 2004. The objectives of the conversation were to:

- develop a shared agreement on the role of the critical friends within the research project;
- clarify the research focus; and
- initiate discussions about my professional practice within the context of knowledge management.

These objectives were developed collaboratively rather than being mandated by me. I have used these individual objectives as a framework to support the analysis of the first critical friend conversation.

#### 5.3.1 *The role of critical friends*

As an outcome of this conversation both staff members agreed to participate in my research investigations in the capacity of critical friends. It was agreed that their roles as critical friends included to:

- ask clarifying and contributing questions;
- provide advice about possible applications within the school;
- assist me in clarifying my thinking; and
- maintain the confidentiality of our conversations.



*The clarification of roles was undertaken through discussion. In hindsight I came to recognise that the views were aligned with the views on the role of a critical friend held by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). Their view is that a critical friend is someone who helps others find the limits of the ways that they are thinking. The role of critical friends is more to ask questions than to provide answers. Critical friends stimulate or facilitate discussions through questioning and conversation. The questions are to make people recognise their underlying assumptions or worldviews and to prepare for future action and change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).*

### 5.3.2 *The focus of the research project*

The second objective of this meeting was the clarification of the focus of the research project. The conversation clarified that the research focus should be the critical analysis of ‘my’ management practices viewed through the lens of knowledge management.

We agreed that the proposed restructuring of the school could become the context within which my professional practices could be critiqued. It was considered that by focusing on my practices as deputy principal within the climate of an organisational restructure, rather than making the restructuring process the focus of the research, the potential for school staff participating in the research feeling threatened would be reduced. By focusing on my professional practices it would be these practices that were critically investigated and it would be me who would be exposed to the risks of being professionally and personally challenged.

Agreement on the research focus enabled the more detailed discussion on my research plan to commence and agreement on the following two broad iterations of action (critical friend conversation, 20/05/2004, p.1).

- Firstly, by employing conversation with a number of scenario groups clarify central issues related to my practice and knowledge management. Some of these central issues were:
  - What does knowledge management mean to teachers?
  - What do the scenario groups think of my professional practice in general?

- How do I model knowledge management principles?
- Secondly, and stemming from the first action, clarify my effectiveness and influence within a still to be identified dimension of my practice.



*Reaching agreement on the research was a significant step forward and it was reassuring that my critical friends saw value in the research. Theory suggests that clarification of the research context is important from a knowledge management perspective. Snowden (2002b) argued it is the context within which the knowledge management activity is being undertaken which is vital.*

*The three central issues identified above would become important to future critical friend conversations as we worked to collaboratively develop the scenario group survey. The survey was used to gather feedback on my professional practice and also provide a framework for discussion about knowledge management and creation.*

### 5.3.3 My professional practice

The agreed research focus demanded the critical self examination of my *praxis*. The process of self examination should lead to clarity of my personal theory of knowledge management. It could also allow me to compare my practice against practices suggested in the knowledge management discourse.

In discussing the exploration of professional practice the conversation identified the following two key questions for consideration early in the research cycle.

- How do I measure enhanced practice; and
- How do I quantify professional benefits?

While these questions were left unanswered at this point it was accepted by all members that they would need to be re-visited in future critical friend conversations.



*The importance of these ‘how’ questions became even more apparent to me during the life of my investigations. Central to living theory action research was my need to justify and clarify statements related to the ‘how’ of my practice. If my practice had changed how was I different? How did I make a difference in the organisational context in which I worked? Significantly Elliott (1991, p.67) states that ‘in action*

*research, theories are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice.'*

#### 5.3.4 Final thoughts

This initial conversation with my critical friends encouraged me to become reflective and I increasingly started to value my existing understanding of issues related to knowledge management. The first conversation could be seen as one spiral within the hermeneutic process. The conversation left questions unanswered which then provided fuel for subsequent conversations. It was agreed that my actions subsequent to this meeting were to:

- clarify key definitions and research question; and
- provide a copy of my confirmation presentation.



*As identified by Schein (1993) I found the dialogue a valuable strategy to resolve problems arising from my fragmentation of thought about knowledge management and its influence on my professional practice. My critical friends and our conversations played a central role in the construction of my knowledge. The social interaction of the conversations was a learning process supporting the transformation of existing knowledge into new knowledge, reflecting Vygotsky's (1978) theory that individuals continually create and re-create meaning as a result of their relationship with others in the social environment. When members of a social setting share their social constructs the cycle of learning is renewed. There are also linkages to the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) where central to the process of knowledge creation is the fact that tacit knowledge needs to become explicit; what's unspoken must be said aloud otherwise it cannot be examined, improved or shared.*

#### 5.4 CRITICAL FRIEND CONVERSATION, 10 JUNE 2004

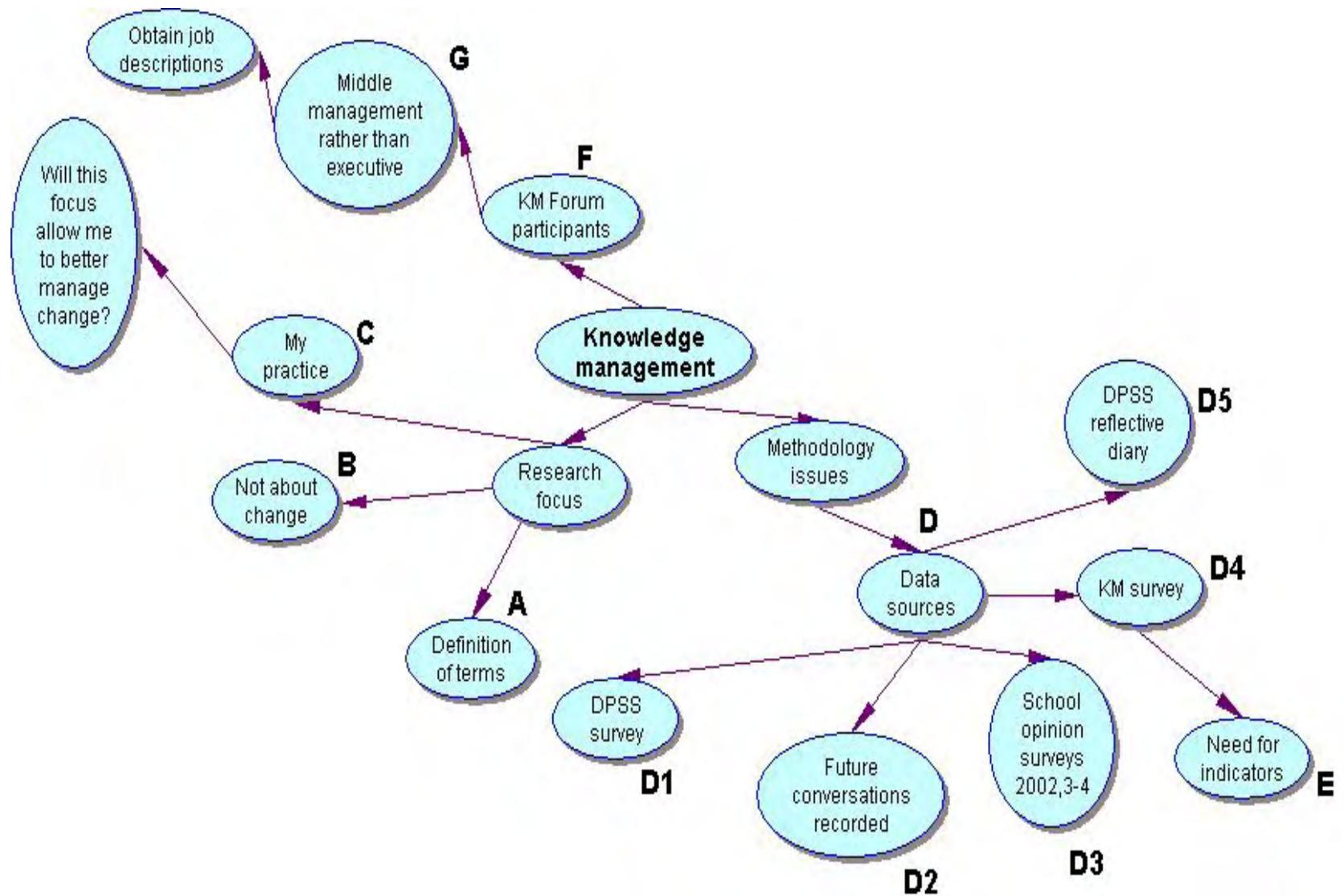
The agenda for the conversation held on the 10 June 2004 was:

- research focus- definition of key terms; and
- methodology issues.

#### *5.4.1 The concept map*

This meeting was the first meeting that I used concept mapping as an analysis tool. The concept map identifies key issues discussed and questions raised during the conversation. It provides a summary of the conversation and highlights key themes and issues to the reader. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A).

The concept map was developed by me after the conversation. The concept map was authenticated during the 4 March 2005 conversation.



Concept Map 1. Critical Friend Conversation, 10 June 2004.

#### *5.4.2 Research focus-definitions of key terms*

A key action identified for this conversation by the critical friends in the previous conversation (20/05/2004) was the clarification of key terms that I was using within the research (A). I provided a definition of knowledge management that reflected my thinking and understanding at that time in my research. I had highlighted to my critical friends the problematic nature of defining knowledge management by sharing with them my confirmation presentation document which they both received copies of prior to this conversation. The following definition and elaboration was accepted after further discussion and amendment.

The critical friends revisited the research problem, even though I believed that a firm resolution had been reached in our initial conversation (critical friend conversation, 20/05/2004). The conversation reinforced the decision made during our previous conversation that shifting the focus from organisational change (B) to on my professional practice reduced the potential risks associated with examining the practices of other organisational members (C). It reduced a number of ethical considerations particularly aspects associated with my power positioning within the organisation. After discussion and amendment (attachment to critical friend conversation, 10/06/2004) my investigation was confirmed as:

‘This research will examine the effectiveness of a school administrator who attempts to model explicit knowledge management principles within his professional practice. A focus of the research will be the critical investigation of knowledge management as a management fad or a framework for sustainable management behaviour.’

### **Artefact 8. Attachment to critical friend conversation (10/06/2004).**

Knowledge management is defined as an holistic management practice that enables individuals in organisations to interact with, utilise and add value to all the information, knowledge and wisdom that an organisation possesses (Todd, 1999). Knowledge management is seen to encompass both the management of information and the management of people.

This definition of knowledge management determines that the process of knowledge management is about continuous learning and people actively engaging with information, constructing knowledge and then applying it. The main task of knowledge management becomes to create an environment of interaction between individuals and the organisation to strengthen each other's knowledge base. To this end, social and informal relationships in an organisation become important; communication between members of the organisation is crucial. (Bhatt, 2000; Stratigos, 2001; Todd, 1999).



*The critical friends accepted my definition without significant challenge. Their interest had been the need for clarification of my working definition of knowledge management rather than an interest in a critical examination of my definitions. The definition adopted clearly reflected my humanistic worldview of knowledge and learning as compared with a scientific worldview. As discussed in chapter 2 the adoption of a humanistic worldview highlights the importance of processes such as sense making and non-rational decision making (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) compared with a scientific worldview which conceptualises the organisation as a rational information processing machine. In chapter 3 I identified that a tension for administrators seeking to manage knowledge is that relationships and conversations in organisations are central to a humanistic worldview of knowledge management. A humanistic worldview aligns with attention to the flow of information and the creation of knowledge; it is people centric rather than technology centric.*

#### *5.4.3 Refinement of research methodology*

The conversation addressed the methodology issue of potential research data. The following range of sources was identified.

- Annual staff survey of my professional practice (D1).
- Audio taped record of future conversations (D2).
- Recent Education Queensland facilitated school opinion surveys (D3).

- Development of a knowledge management survey for each scenario group or individual specifically related to my professional practice and (Appendix 1) (D4).
- A record of my developing thinking maintained as a reflective journal (D5).

From the conversation came three immediate concerns related to data collection. Firstly, to allow better analysis of conversations all future conversations were to be taped and transcribed. Secondly, in the development of the scenario group survey I was to develop indicators of my behaviours that would assist survey respondents to better understand the context of the questions (E). And thirdly, I was to continue to maintain my reflective journal.



*The exact data collection methods to be used were still not clear at this point. I was concerned by this lack of clarity but I drew some comfort from Whitehead's (2003) argument that a researcher doesn't have to select a chosen research methodology from the start. To support his argument Whitehead (2003) cited Dadds and Hart (2001) who suggested that it was important for insider researchers to trust their methodological inventiveness to create their own way through their research. Their research indicated that a practitioner's sense of control over their research is important to their motivation, sense of identity and their research outcomes. Implicit within the identification of any potential data sources was that the research process employed was to reflect an action research paradigm. As indicated in chapter 3, adopting an action research paradigm provides the opportunity for a different kind of knowledge making, that is, the creation of knowledge by taking what is already known and applying it in conditions that are different (Cherry, 1999).*

#### 5.4.4 Final thoughts

During the conversation I also provided some insight into knowledge management from the perspective of the knowledge management forums in which I had participated (F). The forums were practitioner facilitated gatherings where individuals working in knowledge management discussed issues associated with the discourse area. The forum participants worked in a diversity of private and public sector employment areas. My observation was that the participants were

predominantly middle managers or project officers (G). There were few, if any, chief executive officers participating in the forums. It was my suggestion that many of these people were employed to do knowledge management. Their positions appear to be more about information collection, storage and dissemination rather than the support of knowledge creation. The focus was more on systems than people.



*As I worked through the analysis of my conversations it was vital for me to constantly keep at the forefront of my analysis, the influence of my positional power on the authenticity of the evidence. I had to be conscious of the difference between the truth of power and the power of truth (Foucault, 1980). I see the truth of power as the influence that my positional power could exert on the interpretations of events by other organisational members. The truth of power could allow me to analyse evidence and draw conclusions that were not truthful to others but would not be challenged by my critical friends or members of the scenario groups because of the power that I hold within the organisation. Whitehead (2003) warned that history has many examples of the truth of power being used to legitimise what counts as evidence. The power of truth can validate the standards of judgement that can be used to distinguish what counts as evidence. However even the power of truth can become problematic when there is an acceptance that there can be multiple realities and consequently there is sometimes no single truth. My processes developed for authenticating my analysis must allow the power of multiple truths to be clearly evidenced.*

## 5.5 CRITICAL FRIEND CONVERSATION, 9 AUGUST 2004

By 9 August 2004, the time of the third conversation with my critical friends a pattern had developed in the conversations. The conversations normally mirrored the following framework.

- Minutes of the previous conversation have been provided prior to the meeting.
- A very broad agenda provided prior to the meeting.
- At the commencement of the meeting the transcript of the previous conversation was authenticated by the critical friends.;
- Actions agreed to during the previous conversation were revisited.
- Research methodology issues were continuously revisited and refined.

- Issues related to the broad topic of knowledge management were discussed.

In the previous critical friend conversation we had agreed to tape these conversations. At this point taping the conversation enabled me to produce a transcript that summarised the key points that I identified. The group also discussed my idea of the development of concept maps to provide a visual representation of the topics discussed (critical friend conversation, 09/08/2004, p.1). My justification for using the concept maps was that they allowed conversation participations to more easily authenticate the trustworthiness of my analysis and they would enable me to more easily identify common themes in the various conversations.



*By this stage of the data analysis I had found the need for an identification system for each concept map. Each concept map was identified by group name, date and number. The Critical Friend Conversation Map, 9 August 2004, summarises my analysis of the major themes of the conversation. Conversation concept maps would be developed from all future conversations unless otherwise agreed. The concept maps would either be developed after the conversation using the transcript or during the conversation. The approach would be determined by the individual situation. For purposes of authenticating transcript evidence while also maintaining confidentiality I identified the source of each quote from the conversation by allocating each critical friend a number, dating each conversation and numbering each page.*

However the only agenda item for this conversation, 9 August 2004, was to review actions from previous discussion. A key action was the development of a list of indicators of my knowledge management behaviours as related to scenario group survey questions. The conversation was analysed using the following framework headings:

- Methodology review; and
- Knowledge management.

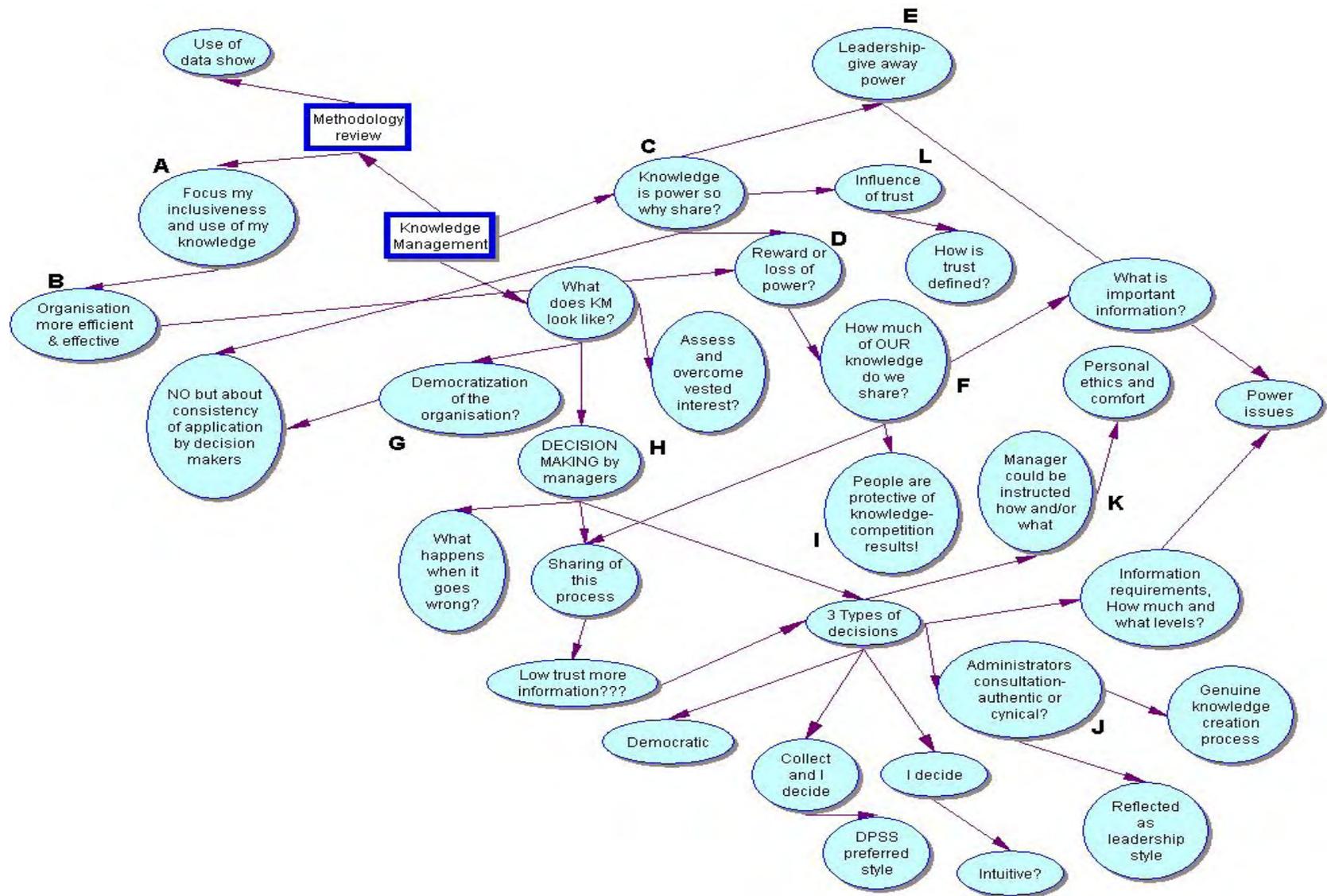


*It was particularly within the last section, 'issues related', that the conversations differed from what I would identify as a formal meeting. The 'issues related' were either identified on the agenda, surfaced during the conversation or were brought to*

*the meeting by the participants. The 'issues related' were generated by all members of the group as each of the critical friends did their own investigation of the literature linked to the broad topic of knowledge management. It was from 'issues related' that most conversation developed and shared understandings arose and future directions were identified.*

#### *5.5.1 The concept map*

The concept map was developed by me after the conversation. The concept map identifies key issues discussed and questions raised during the conversation. It provides a summary of the conversation and serves as a way to highlight key themes and issues to the reader. The concept map was authenticated during the 4 March 2005 conversation. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A). It is important for the reader to note that the alphabetic use does not indicate a linearity of the conversation.



Concept Map 2. Critical Friend Conversation, 9 August 2004.

### 5.5.2 Methodology review

During this conversation, refinements of the research focus and research methodology continued. The clarification of the research focus continued. Critical friend 2 (09/08/2004, p.2) indicated that ‘the research focus is about how Paul’s management of his knowledge and his inclusiveness (A) makes the organisation more efficient and effective’ (B). Critical friend 2 (09/08/2004, p.4) elaborated on the topic and indicated that: ‘Paul’s research focus is now - through my management of knowledge and my engagement of people in that process, how am I a better deputy principal? How are you better for Paul Dillon and for the school? They may sometimes be two different things’.



*While at this point in time these two questions were central questions they did not have a great personal significance. However as my thinking crystallized and my insight into knowledge creation and management developed so too did the significance of the tension between the coercion that can be required to effectively meet my duties as deputy principal and the personal values that I have in relation to valuing the individual and providing the relevant resources to facilitate knowledge creation. The tensions are even greater when as a deputy principal my practice related to knowledge creation is not in alignment with the practice of other members of the school executive team. I elaborate on these issues in chapter 8 where I discuss my research learnings.*

The draft scenario group survey was reviewed and after clarification was accepted. It was clarified that the five survey questions with their associated indicators were actually my indicators of what I believed knowledge management to be (critical friend 2, 09/08/2004, p.7).

### 5.5.3 Knowledge management

The primary theoretical focus of the conversation was the broad area of knowledge management. However in linking knowledge management to professional practice and sharing our related understanding the conversation visited a diversity of theoretical areas.

Critical friend 2 (09/08/2004, p.2) problematised the practical reality of knowledge management as he sought to understand why a teacher in this school would share their knowledge. 'If knowledge is power why would somebody want to share it (C)? Within the system do people who share their knowledge get a reward (D)? What if you believe that it will lessen your power if you share your knowledge (D and E)? Why share if it is not going to make their lot any better?'

Two central questions were raised during the conversation.

1. How much of our knowledge should we share (F)?
2. Is sharing knowledge about the democratisation of the organisation (G)?



*While no specific answers to these questions were provided at that point, nearly 12 months later I can provide a response to the questions. The response draws upon some of the theoretical learnings from this research which are discussed in depth in chapter 8 and represented in the knowledge creation model provided. Firstly, I argue that it is not knowledge that we share but information. It may be my explicit knowledge but when shared with someone else it becomes their information. This shared information can then be used by individuals to create knowledge for their own use. In summary how much knowledge should be shared is an individual decision controlled by four influences. The primary influence is the individual's worldview of knowledge. This view is then influenced by 3 filters:*

- *Relationship filter*
- *Need filter*
- *Context filter*

*These filters will determine the information sharing behaviour adopted by an individual. The level of sharing is dynamic and is in continuous fluctuation as context, need and relationship are all subject to change albeit at varying rates.*

*The sharing of knowledge by individuals is not about democratisation of the organisation. Individuals share information everyday in a multitude of ways. Everyday in this school there is new knowledge created by people, sitting around lunch rooms,*

*sitting in union meetings, people out walking, there is knowledge created about this place. And this is largely done in the absence of anything that administrators do. Administrators can influence the creation of some knowledge and they can create their own knowledge and share it as information. Administrators can influence the development of an information sharing culture.*

The conversation focus on sharing knowledge within an organisation regularly reverted to decision making. It was suggested that one of the biggest influences that knowledge creation could have, particularly from my position as a manager, was in the realm of organisational decision making. (H). Critical friend 2's view (09/08/2004, p. 5), 'go back to the premise that knowledge management across the school is too broad...how knowledge is managed and shared and how people engage with it is to some degree determined by the nature of the decision to be made.'

In exploring decision making, the group supported critical friend 2's view (09/08/2004, p.4) that there are three types or areas of decision making (I).

1. Democratic, we share and we democratically decide.
2. I collect information from a variety of sources and then I decide.
3. I decide.



*I can see linkages between these 3 areas of decision making and the 'identification-development-selection' process of decision making identified by Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Tierney (1976). Nicolas (2004, p.22) suggests that identification recognises the need for decision and develops an understanding of the decision issues. Development leads to the development of solutions or the elaboration of opportunities. Selection evaluates the alternatives and chooses a solution for commitment to action. The decision should be viewed as the strategic choice in which I have to be involved.*

The further exploration of the decision making framework identified a number of issues linked to my performance as an administrator. Firstly, there is a relationship between the level of democracy and the type of decision to be made. Critical friend 2,

(09/08/2004, p. 5) suggested that ‘Where knowledge has been managed well and trust levels are high, it has been where there has been a transparent decision making process and an acceptance of this process.’

Secondly, an administrator’s adherence to the agreed decision making process impacts on levels of trust within the organisation. In the critical friend conversation (09/08/2004, p. 5) I indicated that, when administrators consult and all they do is use the group as a rubber stamp and there is really no consultation, the level of trust drops very quickly and the level of cynicism goes up (J). Individuals involved very quickly make a call whether this type of consultation is an authentic conversation. Critical friend 1 (09/08/2004, p.5) suggested that it might not be trust that the decision is correct but trust that the understood process has been used by the administrator. He also indicated the authenticity in decision making approaches could be an indicator of leadership style. It was suggested that this could be seen as an example of an administrator supporting a genuine knowledge creation process.

Thirdly, critical friend 2 (09/08/2004, p.6) highlighted the potential impact of a decision making process on my ethics. He challenged, ‘What if Paul has to make a decision that is against both his and his staff’s point of view?’ How would I handle the personal and ethical issues associated with being informed by a superior that I must reach a particular decision?’ (K). It was at this point that the concepts of the decision maker’s morals and the humanity of decision making started to be introduced (addition, critical friend 2, 04/03/2005, p.3).



*The deeply personalised issues of why an individual would share knowledge and the contexts in which a manager would use that knowledge were identified as important.*

*We had discussed the application of two types of knowledge management systems as identified by Becerra-Fernandez and Stevenson (2001). Firstly, systems that aim to elicit and transfer tacit knowledge from individuals. Secondly, systems that apply knowledge to assist in solving problems. Clearly these were not two mutually distinct systems but within our context were phases of a natural process of knowledge creation*

*and use. I am increasingly finding the use of the term knowledge management in a tension with the reality of knowledge creation.*

#### 5.5.4 Final thoughts

Our discussion on the management of knowledge within the social grouping that is a school became focused on decision making or problem solving. The management of knowledge in this context is strongly influenced by the type of question or problem that is being answered or the decision under consideration.



*Decision making had been linked with knowledge management implicitly by Becerra-Fernandez and Stevenson (2001) when they identified one group of knowledge management systems are those systems that assist in solving problems. It was explicitly linked by Snowden (2002b) who clearly identified the provision of information for the manager to use to support a decision making process based on a rational and ordered ontology. Snowden (2002b) identified such knowledge management as the first age of knowledge management which was evidenced prior to 1995. However Snowden (2005) now identifies a third generation of knowledge management which embraces a new conceptualisation of decision making drawing on a multi-ontology approach to sense-making. In chapter 8 I provide further elaboration on the influence of Snowden's conceptualisation on my thinking.*

The issues of power and trust appear to be significant within the context of managing knowledge as a decision making process (L). Organisational members involved in decision making could have to share some personal knowledge that would potentially reduce their power. From an administrator's perspective when levels of trust are low within an organisation it is likely that more of my personal workplace knowledge would have to be disclosed if I wanted other members of staff support an initiative or share information. An administrator's actions could also be influenced by their morals as a decision maker and what things are important to them (addition, critical friend 2, 04/03/2005, p.4).



*There would appear to be ongoing questions related to how much knowledge is shared between organisational members, to whom within the organisation this personal knowledge is shared and how existing levels of trust influence practices linked to both information sharing and knowledge creation. These were significant questions for consideration in the future conversations with the scenario groups. I was conscious of the challenges of having conversations with teachers that I work with about issues involving my trustworthiness as an administrator. The question of my trustworthiness was structured into the scenario group survey (Appendix 1).*

## 5.6 CRITICAL FRIEND CONVERSATION, 30 AUGUST 2004

The agenda for the critical friend conversation held on 30 August 2004, was to:

- Confirm that minutes of previous meeting were an accurate summary;
- Review discussion and actions from previous meeting;
- Continue to discuss issues not completed at previous meeting; and
- Trial development of the concept map during the conversation rather than after the conversation.

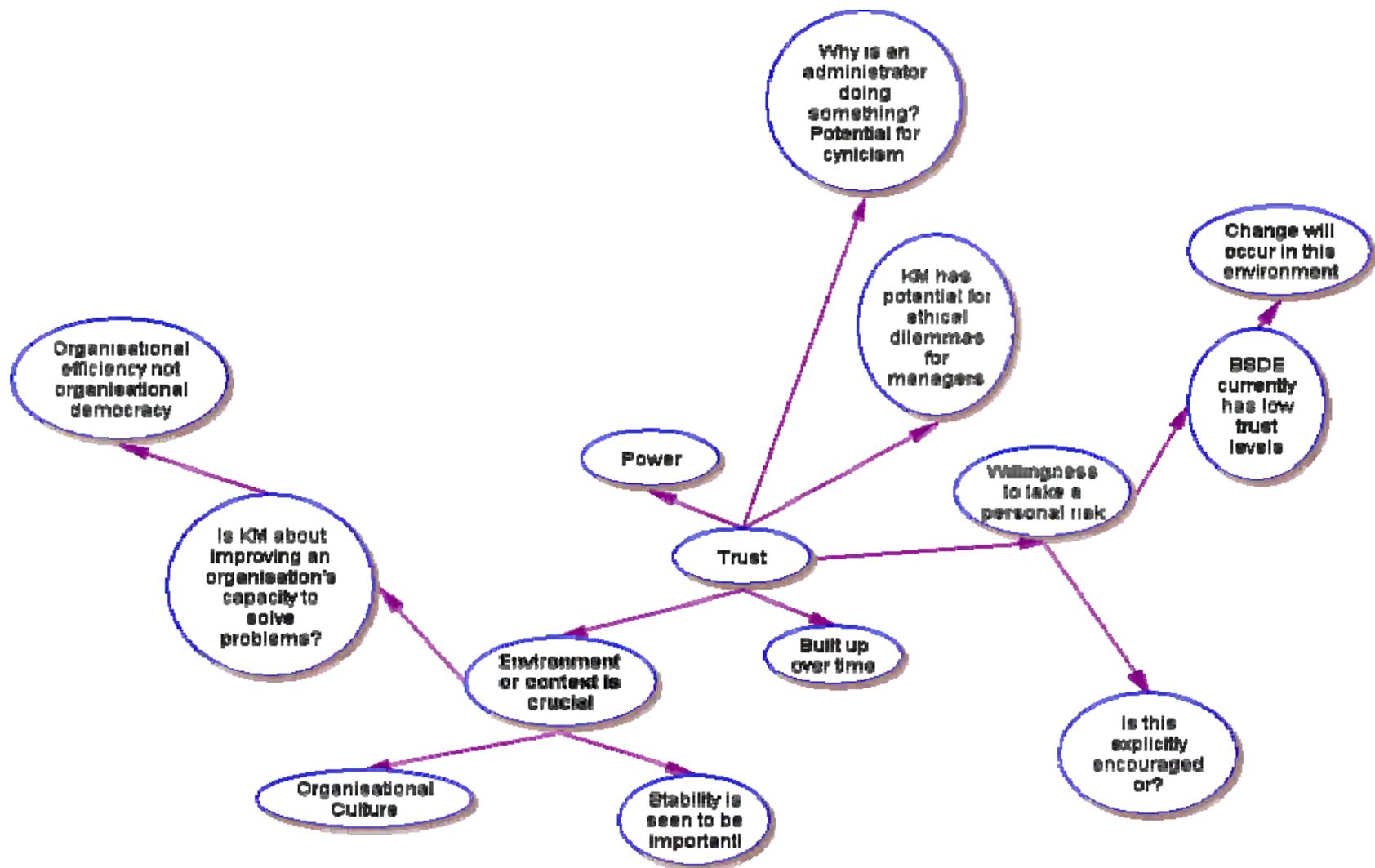
The analysis of this conversation adopted the framework identified in the analysis of the critical friend conversation 9 August 2004:

- Methodology focus; and
- Knowledge management.

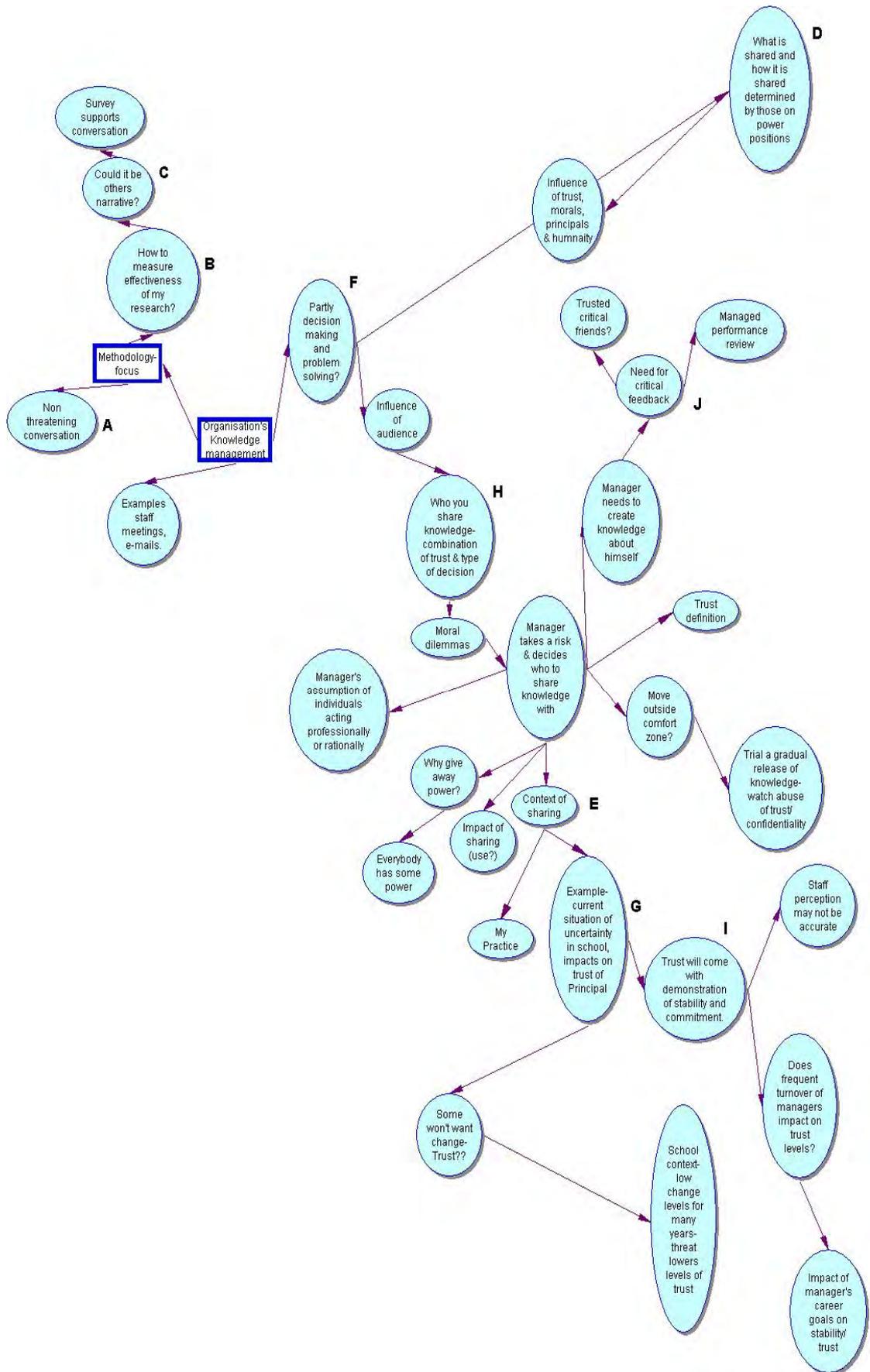
### 5.6.1 *The concept maps*

Significantly this was the first conversation where I experimented with the development of the concept map during the conversation. I developed the concept map with limited feedback from the critical friends as they did not have clear vision of the developing map on the computer screen. Even though the concept map was completed at the end of the conversation I had reservations about the completeness and accuracy of the concept map. I found that the development of the concept map during the conversation negatively impacted on my involvement in the conversation. As evidence of these

influences on the concept maps I have provided two versions of the concept maps. Concept Map 3 was created during the meeting and Concept Map 4 was developed after the meeting using the conversation transcript. The significant differences between the maps would appear to suggest that the map developed from the conversation transcript after the meeting reflects a more accurate depiction of the meeting. In future conversations if concept maps were to be produced during the meeting, data show technology was used to allow all participants to be involved in the development of the map. The concept map for this conversation constructed after the conversation was authenticated by the critical friends on the 2 November 2004. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on Concept Map 4 and in the narrative, for example (A).



Concept Map 3. Critical Friend Conversation, 30 August 2004, version during meeting.



Concept Map 4. Critical Friend Conversation, 30 August 2004, version from transcript.

### 5.6.2 Refinement of research methodology

I reported to my critical friends that refining the research focus to my professional practice had already been valuable. As a part of my research I had undertaken a conversation with one of the school's union representatives (26/08/2004) and being able to focus the conversation on my professional practice created a less threatening environment and supported a more open conversation (A). The conversation, which focused on communication and information sharing within the school, is analysed in chapter 6.

Critical friend 1 (30/08/2004, p.1) questioned whether I had set some boundaries to measure my effectiveness to allow me to determine at some point in the future the learnings/outcomes from my research (B). My response (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.1) was to suggest that measurement might be in the story or narrative that individual people involved in research tell about my effectiveness at the end point rather than there being a single measurable indicator (C). I identified that at a workshop that I recently participated in I had become aware of the research work of Snowden (2002b) who outlined the potential for narrative to be a tool for knowledge management within organisations. Critical friend 2 (30/08/2004, p.2) supported the power of story telling and suggested that the individual scenario group survey responses would have useful indicators that would support my narrative about my effectiveness.



*In further considering the question of how I will measure the influence and effectiveness of my research I realised that if I really did live my previously stated ontology of multiple realities (chapter 3) then any measure of my effectiveness must not only reflect my personal judgements developed around my criteria but also judgements by individuals within the scenario groups developed around the criteria. My opinion at this stage of my research is that the question should be considered from two perspectives, my personal effectiveness and my professional effectiveness. While these are presented as separate perspectives in my reality they are closely interrelated. The knowledge management survey responses from the scenario group participants would provide a point in time indication of my personal effectiveness.*

### *5.6.3 Knowledge management*

The conversation was wide ranging and touched on a variety of management issues. Significantly there were issues revisited from previous critical friend conversations. In summary the key areas discussed in the conversation related to power, context, decision making, sharing and trust. To support my summary statement I have identified what I believe to be the key issues discussed during the conversation under the following areas identified.

#### ***Power (D)***

- Those in positions of power determined what information is shared (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.2).
- If knowledge is power why would an individual knowingly give away their power (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.2)?

#### ***Context (E)***

- Context is an important influence on the sharing of information and the creation of knowledge (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.3, 4, 5, 6). Context can be the situation and conditions under which sharing and creation occur.

#### ***Decision making (F)***

- The decision to share knowledge with another individual or group creates risk for an individual and a requirement for an individual to move outside their comfort zone and it can create moral dilemmas for the individual (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.2, 3).
- Decision making is a central function of knowledge management within the school (critical friend 2, 30/08/2004, p.1)

#### ***Trust (G)***

- The levels of trust (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.2, 3, 4, 5) and the type of decision (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.2) strongly influence with whom an individual shares knowledge.
- How is trust defined or conceptualised within an organisational situation (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.2)?

- Managers need to create personal knowledge or an understanding about themselves. One strategy that can be used to achieve this is to converse with trusted critical friends (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.5).
- When managers share information they assume that individuals will act professionally with that information (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.3).

In elaborating on the direct relationship between trust and the sharing of information, critical friend 2 (30/08/2004, p.2) suggested that ‘I trust the information that I gave away wouldn’t be used against me. The information that I give away will be for the benefit of the organisation that I worked for. It is my intuition of what I feel is the right thing to do. If you misused that trust I would withdraw from you and it would take a long time to come back out again... trust, you go out on a limb for somebody.’ In a later statement critical friend 2 (30/08/2004, p.7) highlighted the vital importance of personal relationships, values and principles on knowledge management.



*There is a relationship between honesty and trust. Honesty is openness: giving appropriate, truthful and timely information. Dishonesty is the withholding or distortion of appropriate information. Honesty and trust reinforce each other (Nooteboom, 2003, p.30).*

*In providing critical feedback to my draft writings (May, 2005), my academic supervisor provided me with a journal paper entitled, ‘Influences on knowledge processes in organisational learning: the psychosocial filter’ (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000). He suggested that there were possible linkages with issues raised within this critical friend discussion and ‘the psychosocial filter’. In summary, their conceptualisation of the psychosocial filter suggests knowledge importing and knowledge sharing activities within organisations are mediated by individual perceptions of approachability, credibility and trustworthiness (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000).*

Critical friend 2 (30/08/2005, p.2) expanded on his view of trust and indicated that ‘it comes back to my basic premise that knowledge management is about making an

organisational decision and not about the democratization of an organisation (H).

The trust factor is a critical ingredient...individuals will try sharing information that is low risk, they will wait and see what happens. Depending on the outcomes they will either provide information that increases the risk or share less information and reduce the risk. From this trial individuals will determine both trustworthiness and usefulness for the organisation or self.'



*Denning( 2001, p.77 ) argues that in organisations we have slid into the practice of treating people as things, and now business schools are even implicitly recommending it as good practice. Adopting this practice results in a break down in trust and the ability of organisations to enlist their employees' cooperation is collapsing, precisely at the moment, in the knowledge economy, when organisations are increasingly dependent on enlisting employees' support. Conditions inside an organisation that can influence levels of trust include the type of tasks, organisational structure, type of leadership, culture, processes of interaction and patterns of communication (Nootboom & Six, 2003).*

Stability and time in an organisation can lead to higher levels of trust (critical friend 2, 30/08/2004, p.5). He questioned whether it is harder to have stability and trust in a situation where managers are replaced at regular intervals (I).



*There are important links between trust and learning in the sense that one needs time and experience to understand people's competencies and intentions and to identify them. Learning also requires trust (Nootboom & Six, 2003, p12).*

Critical friend 2 (30/08/2004, p.3) suggested that 'knowledge management engages a good practitioner in moral dilemmas. You need to factor in your principles and morals.'

In commenting specifically about my professional practice critical friend 1 (30/08/2004, p.3) suggested, 'a strong part of your practice is that by sharing knowledge you might even increase your power. This contrasts with some others in the school who appear to build their power base around holding closely onto knowledge.'

Critical friend 1 (30/08/2004, p.5) suggested ‘that to some degree what people say about you around the table is what drives you, particularly critical can be the views of people who you value. A challenge is that some decision makers surround themselves with yes men and choose not to place reliable and honestly critical people around them’. The issue of trust was evidenced again (J).

In a statement that summarised many of key issues that I have identified in this conversation, critical friend 2 (30/08/2004, p.3) suggested that every decision to share knowledge would be impacted upon by one or more of the following elements:

- the nature of what you are sharing;
- the degree of risk at which you place yourself;
- the people with whom you are interacting;
- the trust that exists; and
- your own moral or ethical standards.

#### *5.6.4 Final thoughts*

This critical friend conversation focused on knowledge creation in the school within the context of problem solving and decision making. There was a close examination of the influence of trust on knowledge management. It was acknowledged that sharing knowledge with others contains an element of risk for the individual who is sharing.

During the conversation I alluded to research by Snowden (2002b, 2003) that I had read (critical friend conversation, 30/08/2004, p.1). I indicated that there appeared to be many parallels between issues raised in our conversations and Snowden’s writings. Snowden discussed issues linked to the influences of personal ethics, trust, relationships and context on the sharing of knowledge within an organisation. Both critical friends indicated that they would appreciate copies of the writings as they could provide a theoretical grounding to our, until now, practitioner-experience based conversations. The articles could also act as catalysts for future conversations.



*From a personal perspective Snowden's (2002b, 2003) writing affirmed my writings on the conceptualisation of knowledge as a process or flow (Snowden, 2000 b, 2003) and he also challenged the modernist management discourse that presented management as an ordered science. He wrote of a chaotic system reflecting my ontology of multiple realities. In later writings by Snowden (2005) he identifies and discusses multi-ontology sense making.*

*An interesting point to consider as we, as a group of critical friends, looked to Snowden's writings was whether we were placing more value and authority on the espoused theory of an external 'expert' rather than on our knowledge as practitioners? Were we as practitioners so conditioned to such a value status that we need external affirmation of our own experience based personal theories? Or is this comparison with an external expert, the 'checking of our reality', a valuable professional practice?*

## 5.7 CRITICAL FRIEND CONVERSATION, 2 NOVEMBER 2004

The agenda for this critical friend conversation held on 2 November 2004, was to:

- confirm the transcription of the previous conversation as an accurate summary;
- confirm the accuracy of the associated concept map;
- discuss the Students at Risk scenario group survey responses and conversation; and
- reflect upon and discuss Snowden's articles related to knowledge management.

### 5.7.1 *The concept map*

The concept map for this conversation was constructed after the conversation. It was authenticated by the critical friends during the 04/03/2005 conversation. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A).



### 5.7.2 Methodology

The process of refining the scenario group survey and positioning it within the research continued. To this point I had drawn upon the literature associated with the knowledge management discourse to identify six related areas of my practice. I then reflected on my practice to identify a range of behaviours that I believed demonstrated my performance in each of these six areas of my knowledge management practice.

Artefact 9, an extract from the transcription of the critical friend conversation provides a clear indication that my critical friends continued to support the primary role of the survey as providing a discussion stimulus for the scenario group conversations and to surface issues that were not in the consciousness of the individual participants. The final survey is provided in Appendix 1. The scenario group survey results (Appendix 2) could provide indicators of areas of strength and weakness in my professional practice and provide evidence in the development of my personal theory for living.

#### **Artefact 9. Critical friend conversation (02/11/2004, p.21).**

CF 1	...if you're not using it as a statistically valid survey instrument, which I don't think you are...
CF 2	Stimulus material.
CF 1	Yeah, I think if that's the case, the allocation of time to that and the impact of that, again, nothing to do with your research... getting the staff at this time is probably not a wise tactic.
CF 2	You want it there for validity, don't you?
Paul D	Well, my research is saying, my work is around conversations. And I'm saying that the value was in...
CF 1	The conversation it stimulated as opposed to the actual hard qualitative and quantitative data you obtained from that.
Paul D	And you could argue that the quantitative data doesn't really reflect – if our argument is that sometimes people don't know what they know until they have the conversation... so just the way people have been challenged by trying to find what knowledge management is, but yet they had no trouble talking for an hour and half, that last group, about things to do with decision-making, sharing information, power, trust...
CF 1	So, for example, putting it down in black and white, we might get some camouflaging or...

Paul D	Yeah.
CF 1	... conformity. You might get misinterpretation of what it's about. I see that as an instrument whereby you're stimulating conversation, putting some direction to the conversation, providing them with some thoughts to bring to that conversation, stimulate some thoughts. As opposed to, yeah, I'm going to add up how many have said this, what percentage said that. I don't see it as that, a valid, of you like, survey instrument. It's more a stimulus for discussion which is the nature of that research.



*Critical friend 1 in artefact 9 has clearly indicated that the scenario group survey is about scaffolding the conversation through stimulating conversation, providing direction and stimulating thoughts. The survey was not about the generation of an objective measurement such as a percentage score. The survey and the associated indicators could be seen as a tool that supported making explicit the implicit or practitioner knowledge of the individual practitioner as outlined in the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) as previously discussed in chapter 2. The SECI model proposes that the creation of knowledge is a continuous process of dynamic interactions between tacit and explicit knowledge. The tacit knowledge of individuals is surfaced as it moves through a spiralling process of socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation (SECI).*

### 5.7.3 Reflection on Snowden's literature

In facilitating this conversation I adopted a different approach to previous conversations. Previous conversations had been fuelled by our individual practitioner based knowledge, whereas in this conversation our reflection was based on the written knowledge of an external expert. As previously discussed this different approach came from the suggestion of the critical friends during our 30 August conversation. In the 30 August conversation I had identified commonalities in the work of Snowden (2002b, 2003) with issues discussed in our conversations. The group saw value in spending time reflecting on Snowden's (2002b, 2003) writings. Examples of the commonalities that I saw between our conversations and Snowden's (2002b, 2003) writings included the influences of personal ethics, trust, relationships and context, on the sharing and creation of knowledge within an organisation.

In analysing this conversation I do not intend to re-present the information contained within the relevant concept map (critical friends, 02/11/2004) but rather to highlight evidence where Snowden's (2002b, 2003) published ideas that have either supported or challenged issues discussed during previous critical friend conversations. Drawing from within Snowden's work the critical friends identified three key influences on knowledge management and creation that resonated with issues discussed in previous critical friend conversations. They were:

- Context (A1);
- Need (A2); and
- Relationships (A3).

I have used these three influences as a framework to develop the concept map from this conversation and also as a framework to analyse the evidence provided in the conversation.

### ***Knowledge management and context.***

I use context as a broad descriptor embracing the situation or environment in which the management activity occurs. As examples of context Snowden (2002b, p.15) provides the context of high-resilience organisations, such as fire fighting crews and aircraft carriers. In my research, situation examples of context could be an educational institution, or it could be in the senior school or it could be within the context of one of my research scenario groups. The central issue is that, in knowledge management, context is the be all and end all of practice (Snowden, 2002b, p.15). The significant influence of context supports a challenge to the broad transferability of strategy that is often promised in modernist management discourses. The reality is that a management strategy that may work for me in one context may not necessarily transfer well to another context (B).

I would argue that there is uniqueness of context between and within all organisations. Individual contexts influence the transferability of knowledge management principles between organisations and departments within organisations. When looking to work with the management of knowledge there is a risk that the

uniqueness of the organisation is not considered and generalisation as related to knowledge management can occur (critical friend 1, 02/11/2004, p.5). In this conversation several narratives demonstrated the influence of context within the school, examples included; operating within a bureaucratic organisation and responding to an externally imposed initiative.

Artefact 10, an extract from the conversation transcript, provides an insightful example of how Snowden's consideration of context was seen by the critical friends as being yet often not taken into consideration. It clearly demonstrates the need for an administrator to fully understand the context in which they are working.

**Artefact 10. Critical friend conversation (02/11/2004, p.12).**

One other thing, I reckon a really, really good statement. A good designer observes patterns of human interaction before designing. So, for example, when you're going to put a path in, you look where people walk now and then you put the path. But, on occasion you decide, oh, hang on, we don't want to walk that way so we build a hedge and put the path that way, because we want it to go in that direction. I thought that supported that concept of saying, okay, what's the context of this organisation? Or, what's the context of this decision?

... Until I think you see if there is a pattern there. And I think in terms of knowledge management, that comes back to all that gut feeling stuff. You get an experience and say, hang on, before I jump into here and make the same decisions here, perhaps I better have a look at the lie of the land. How do they do it? What do they do now? What's the expectations in the organisation? What's the cultural expectations of the organisation? What are the processes they finance? You know, it's that idea of saying they walk that way across there. So do we build a path there? Or if we don't want that to happen, we build a path in another direction and we put barriers in this so people don't go across there. So, you know, I saw that as a good example of the decision-making process....

The critical friends suggested that if context was considered by administrators when making decisions there would be a number of factors related to the particular context surrounding the decision that should be taken into account before making the decision. When an administrator has a clear understanding of the specific considerations associated with the particular organisational context, better decisions can be made.

### ***Knowledge management and need.***

Our conversations had increasingly revisited decision making as the need for, and as the context within which, the creation and management of knowledge occurred. Need was one specific contextual area highlighted by Snowden (2000b). To be asked if something was known in the context of a specific need was more likely to elicit a response than to be asked to codify knowledge in the absence of that context (Snowden, 2003, p.26). Snowden (2002b) had not specifically focused on decision making as a knowledge management context (C).



*However Snowden (2002b, p.1) does make the distinction between the ‘timely provision of decision support’ and the holistic act of decision making. In an earlier section of this chapter I have presented critical friend 2’s model which outlines three types of decision making (09/08/2004, p.7). The focus of our conversations has been the holistic act of decision making rather than simply the provision of information to support decision making. In the early days of my research my worldview would have positioned knowledge management as being about the timely provision of information to support decision making. More recently Snowden (2005) has explored the use of ‘multi-ontology sense making’ as a new simplicity in decision making. Decision making is now being clearly positioned in some knowledge management literature.*

A key issue raised in the exploration of decision making was the clarification of whether the knowledge for decision making was based on the manager gathering objective evidence or the manager’s intuition (D). When administrators made decisions based on intuition was this demonstrating the application of implicit knowledge? Did an administrator’s core values influence how they made a decision? Artefact 11 highlights that intuition, experience and professionalism were presented by critical friend 2 as alternate descriptors for core values.

### Artefact 11. Critical friend conversation (02/11/2004, p.6)

Personalised experiential knowledge and gut feeling. And I reckon knowledge management, if we look at those three areas about context and organisation and needs within the organisation and the individuals within the organisation and the humanity of it, I reckon gut feeling impacts more and more as you move along the chain. As you move along the chain and have greater responsibility for knowledge management in your organisation, then I would suspect more and more are you expected to conform to the generalised principles in that organisation. But more and more I believe lot of those decisions are made on gut feeling, based on your experience. Imposing forces so to speak.



*In relation to decision making, the relative importance of context may be influenced by the type of decision. The decision types; consensus, informed or executive, were outlined previously in the critical friend conversation 9 August 2004. The role of 'gut feeling' or 'intuition' in relation to decision making is described by Snowden (2000b) as 'contextual pattern recognition' which often occurs at a non-conscious level. From an administrator's perspective these patterns are ingrained and based on past experience (Snowden, 2002b, p.15). The importance of a diverse range of experience could be argued to be an important component of an administrator's professional development. From the perspective of an administrator working with teachers, some patterns, such as those based on trust are difficult to influence and while trust is built up over years it can be lost in seconds.*

An important issue identified by critical friend 2 (02/11/2004, p.6) was the influence of the decision maker's position within a hierarchical management structure on their accountability for knowledge management. Administrators, because of their senior position within an organisational structure, could more frequently feel the pressure of whose need, particularly if it was an externally imposed need. The pressure associated with need may force an administrator to act in a way that they would normally not prefer to act. There could be a clash with their core values. Ultimately the trust that they had developed with the people that they work with could be damaged.



*In educational administration, context and need are sometimes difficult to separate. An externally derived need could create pressure on the administrator to achieve a designated outcome. The administrator may use a range of management strategies*

*to obtain conformance from staff and achieve the outcome required. Within the context of knowledge creation and management there is a growing body of evidence that camouflage and conformance are more common than full knowledge sharing even when there appears to be measurable compliance (Snowden, 2000b, p.16).*

*I have identified some questions for consideration. Administrators often achieve their desired outcomes and hear the answers that they were required to hear, and achieve the action that they were required to achieve, but is the outcome sustainable? Who has the need for the decision? If knowledge sharing is mandated is it really sharing? Is camouflaging behaviour occurring? Is the knowledge created and shared really meaningful? What levels of coercion have been employed in these knowledge creation activities? These questions must be addressed in any model that I develop to represent knowledge creation and management associated with my practice.*

### ***Knowledge management and relationships.***

Critical friends confirmed the centrality of relationships to knowledge management. Critical friend 1 (02/11/2004, p.5) indicated that in our context, knowledge management was as much about relationships as it was about the clinical exchange of information. The linkages between knowledge management and relationships could be evidenced in a number of ways within the school. One manifestation of relationships that had been discussed in previous conversations was trust, particularly as linked to organisational members' comfort that an administrator won't abuse their power (E). Artefact 12 is a conversation transcript outlining the trust relationship between teachers and a specific Head of Department. It provides some practitioner indicators of trust.

### **Artefact 12. Critical friend conversation (02/11/2004, p.16).**

Paul D.	But that person's power comes from the fact that he will deliver.
CF 2	Yep, and he will deliver... yeah, trust.
Paul D.	You've got trust.
CF 1	People totally trust him.
CF 2	And he's, if you like, forthright in his knowledge management.

CF 1	People actually trust his knowledge, they trust his ability and they trust his intuition.
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The interpersonal skills of a manager were identified as being important for an administrator developing trust (Paul D, 02/11/2004, p.15). Trust developed from an administrator's ability to manage knowledge about how they work with people and subsequently how they manage themselves (F). Critical friend 2 (02/11/2004, p.3) defined the dealing with individual people as the humanity of knowledge management. The complex interrelationship between managing self and managing others is indicated in artefact 13 where factors; time, fear of abuse and the need to retain power were identified as key influences on knowledge management (G).

**Artefact 13. Critical friend conversation (02/11/2004, p.9).**

CF 1	The other part I found interesting, he (Snowden) identifies some of the three critical factors in knowledge management as time, fear of abuse and retaining power.
CF2	Which are all the things we've talked about.
CF1	Yeah. I like them...



*The challenge for an administrator is how to manage and monitor the influence of their professional practices on the creation and maintenance of trust through the influencing factors of time, fear of abuse and retaining power. These factors were seen to strongly influence knowledge management (Snowden, 2003). The challenge should not be underestimated because Snowden (2002a, p.15) suggests that some key patterns, such as those based on trust are particularly difficult to influence or direct.*

The influence on knowledge creation and management by relationships external to the organisation, were also identified by the critical friends. As a manager I need to accept that when I am dealing with staff I am not working within the isolation of the school environment. All organisational members operate within a range of external environments and any of these environments could also impact upon their emotions and subsequent actions within the workplace (critical friend 2, 02/11/2004, p.19).



*The day to day issues of life impact on individuals. Sickness of a family member, death of a loved one, relationship breakdown are examples of life issues that could be impacting on teachers. These life issues can challenge the assumption that individuals will act rationally and/or professionally with the information that they possess. These issues may more easily be shared with an administrator if trust exists between the parties involved.*

The important link between dialogue and relationships within the school was also identified. As manager seeking to support the development of a shared understanding and the creation of knowledge I need to create opportunities for conversation or dialogue (H). A management challenge can arise, as through increasing these opportunities the potential for conflict is increased. Importantly conflict should not be seen as a negative because creative tension and creative resolution could sometimes result from conflict (critical friend 2, 02/11/2004, p.19). If as a manager I attempt to minimise the tension associated with conflict there is a risk that I will restrict opportunities for organisational creativity. However the reality was that within this organisation critical friend 2 (02/11/2004) indicated that he would not engage in a public professional argument as it would very quickly move to a personalised attack on him.

An approach to knowledge management that we would not have discussed if not for engaging with Snowden's writings was a very practical strategy, mentoring (I). Mentoring supports the sharing, with a specified professional colleague, knowledge that we know we have and the surfacing of knowledge that we don't explicitly know that we have. A mentor can support the development of specific professional skills in their colleague. Mentoring can also support personal development and growth in both parties involved in the mentor relationship (Paul D, 02/11/2004, p.10). Artefact 14 highlights the personalised nature of mentoring as a knowledge creation and management process.

#### **Artefact 14. Critical friend conversation (02/11/2004, p.9).**

And the other thing I took from that article, I suppose, was the idea of apprenticeship or mentoring, the personalised nature of that. If it's about systemic knowledge management, they don't need a mentor, here's the manual. So if knowledge management wasn't, if you like, so personalised or humanised, why do you build in it's a necessary factor in knowledge management, mentoring. You build that in because that brings in the personalised approach. You know, the person being mentored and the mentor, too, gains from that process, I believe, by having to justify and validate what they do to themselves and often to the person, the apprentice. What that's doing is, if you like, trying to pass on your experiences and gut feeling to the new person.



*Mentoring could be seen as a practical representation of the previously discussed SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Mentoring specifically supports the socialisation aspect of knowledge creation. Mentoring that is effective generates the creation of knowledge in a continuous process of dynamic interactions between tacit and explicit knowledge.*

#### *5.7.4 Final thoughts*

The reflection on Snowden's (2002b, 2003) literature affirmed our methodological decision to employ conversations and narrative as a major data collection tool. Snowden (2002b, 2003) highlighted the value of narrative and conversation in developing an understanding of knowledge management. The opportunity for reflection was, in simple terms, an opportunity to 'pat ourselves on the back' and acknowledge that independently of Snowden's research, we as practitioner researchers had identified a number of legitimate and significant issues linked to knowledge management. From a self-learning perspective I identified that I may be too self reflective which can hamper my capacity to make quick decisions (Paul D, 02/11/2004, p.13).

The reflection was a timely motivational moment for critical friends and research student alike. It also identified new directions for future conversations. These included:

- the role of stories within the organisation;
- the significance of trust in the knowledge creation process; and

- the relationship between decision making and knowledge creation.

## 5.8 CRITICAL FRIEND CONVERSATION, 4 MARCH 2005

For critical friend conversation 4 March 2005, it had been over 5 months since our last critical friend conversation. Busy end of year and start of year school activities had combined with my research analysis of the scenario group conversations, to cause the time delay. The agenda for this conversation was to:

- authenticate my analysis of 2004 critical friend conversations and associated concept maps;
- authenticate my methodology overview; and
- report on my research time lines.

### 5.8.1 *Authentication of analysis and concept maps*

To authenticate my analysis of the five critical friend conversations undertaken during 2004 both critical friends were provided with photocopies of my analysis prior to this conversation. During the conversation they also had access to copies of the minutes and transcripts of previous conversations.

Subject to a number of minor amendments the critical friends authenticated my 2004 analysis and associated concept maps. The necessary amendments were:

- Highlight that the role of critical friend was undertaken on a confidential basis;
- Clarify the term ‘humanistic worldviews’ as used within the section defining key terms;
- Elaborate on the differences between the truth of power and power of truth; and
- Add issues related to the humanity of decision maker and the decision maker’s morals.

These amendments have been completed and notated where appropriate.

### 5.8.2 *Knowledge management and my professional practice*

Critical friend 2 (04/03/2005, p.5) indicated that during the conversation it would be valuable to revisit the reasons that I was doing my doctoral studies. He suggested that one of the reasons was for me to develop a greater understanding of the decision-making processes that I follow. One of the critical aspects of the research is that when you make a decision, on what basis are you making that decision? How do you handle all of those influences that we have identified, the context, the personalities involved including your own, and the moral dilemmas that may be placed in front of you?

Critical friend 1 reflected that before the holidays I had taken a secondary staff meeting and during the meeting in response to an agenda item I had stood up and said that 'I've made an executive decision' (04/03/2005,p.6). The dialogue following this statement illustrated the development in my practice, particularly within the context of decision making, that occurred during the life of the critical friend process. To outline the dialogue that occurred I have provided an edited version of the conversation as artefact 15 which contains the key questions and responses. The inclusion of such a large artefact within the body of this dissertation is a conscious decision reflecting the significance of this particular exchange. The artefact serves as a powerful affirmation of changes in my practice and an increased personal awareness of my thinking related to decision making and trust and the subsequent influence on my practice. I have illustrated these influences by providing answers to the central questions of the dialogue.

#### **Artefact 15. Critical friend conversation (04/03/2005).**

CF1:	I read this last night, and before the holidays you took a secondary staff meeting, and I said to you at the time, I was watching you, and you got up and you said "I've made an executive decision." I watched. I looked around for feedback. I thought okay, for someone to get up and make that statement, for you in particular, because you identified that you might be too self reflective which could hamper your capacity to make quick decisions. I thought okay, how do you apply, in the context of knowledge management, for you to get up and say I made an executive decision. ....why you make executive decisions and how that would fit in with your view point of your role as a manager?
Paul D:	Yes, it's interesting you say that, because the other thing that's come out of some of the other scenario group conversations is the consistency of a

	manager's behaviour, and the consistency of my behaviour relates to the level of pressure that I'm under, and so therefore that's why I would have acted that way.
CF1:	But importantly, that's the first time I've ever heard you say that.
Paul D:	Yes.
CF2:	But I don't see that as a bad thing. In fact I see it as a very positive thing.
CF1:	It wasn't judgmental. It was just so untypical for you to say that.
CF2:	And to me that's the important development process, because with that, standing up in front of the secondary staff in particular and saying I've made this decision.
CF1:	That's right.
CF2:	...did you find that easier to stand up and make that announcement or make that decision, than you would have in the past? Prior to doing your studies and engaging in this process did you make a conscious decision about making the executive decision?
CF1:	Well actually stating that you're making it.
Paul D:	Until recently I haven't consciously reflected about decisions. I was even thinking today if I had to write an application for a job, and had to address change management, I'd written an application for this job in a particular way, but I think now I'd write by saying yes, this would be the standard way I would go about making decisions for change, but I have to acknowledge there are other types of decisions and in some of those cases I wouldn't use the standard approach. So...
CF2:	It comes back to what we were saying before about the context in which you make the decision. All I submit it really is, it's a case by case. There are general principles and processes that you follow, and on a case by case basis you'll make decisions.
Paul D:	I have become clearer in my thinking. Like the other day when (staff member named) took me on about removal of students from his classes, and I disagree and I want them put back on and I said no. They're not going back on mate. So, this has certainly helped me clarify is this behaviour – it hasn't made it any easier when I'm just about to go over the edge.
CF2:	No, but actually having that, making that statement, I believe there would be a significant number of staff numbers, particularly in the context in which the school is being led at the moment, who would appreciate that there's a decision being made, to some degree you said it some time ago about what do people seek from their boss, and one of the really interesting pieces of research was that apart from recognition of their work, which is critical, was that they made decisions. Interestingly, even if they weren't actually right, but the fact that they would make a decision.
CF1:	Well if we go back to the executive decision. I wrote down a few questions from your view point. For you to make that statement, would you ever reflect on the fact that you actually said it?
Paul D:	No. If you hadn't of raised it with me I most probably wouldn't have reflected on that.
CF1:	Were you confident in the fact that you did it?
Paul D:	I did it.

CF1:	You did it, okay. Would you do this?
Paul D:	Sorry, can I just expand.
CF1:	How often would you do it, like this is something?
Paul D:	I'm intuitive. Like I have to know this sort of thing.
CF1:	So you're drawing on knowledge management principles even when you're making that decision?
	Okay.
CF2:	Gut feelings.
CF1:	Right. This is where it gets back to what I was reading here last night. This is from my view point sitting there watching it, okay.
	Would it be the mark of a good manager to be able to do this? Obviously I think it probably would be.
Paul D:	Yeah.
CF1:	The leadership section. These are the two things that came up.
	Would it be a measure of the trust – we go back to the trust question – a measure of trust that people, had in you, that made you feel confident to be able to do it?
Paul D:	I don't make that assumption and then clear it. No I don't.
CF1:	See that's what I was thinking at the time. Obviously there's, you being the manager a lot of those people do trust you because you're in that position.
Paul D:	No I would, I have learned with that crowd I'll never make an assumption about the level of trust.
CF1:	Yeah.
CF2:	That's the other one I suppose. Would it be the measure of trust that you had in your staff that would allow you to make that decision? So it works both ways. Just looking at your position. Okay. It's just something --
Paul D:	It's much more of a pragmatic thing, that I'm saying, that I'm boxed into a corner. This has got to be made. This reason, this reason, this reason.

*Was the use of the phrase 'executive decision' a conscious decision?*

No it was not premeditated but when I used the term I was very aware that it was one type of decision out of a model that provides three options. I was conscious that it was a decision that I had made but I did provide an explanation around the statement. The critical friend conversations related to decision making had increased my awareness of my decision making actions and made me more conscious of my approach to the specific situation and was clear in the fact that I had made the decision and that it was not a democratic decision.

*Had I thought through all the issues with using the phrase?*

Not all of the issues but as indicated in my answer above I was conscious of the type decision and the underpinning parameters.

*Did it reflect a reality that I had a better conceptualisation of decision making?*

My decision reinforced to me the leadership component of the administrator's role in that in some situations there is a greater need to have a decision than to go through a more expansive decision making process. In this context I was aware that any new knowledge created around the issue had been predominantly mine.

*Was it just a phrase used in pragmatic situation?*

It may have been a pragmatic decision but in using the term executive decision I was very conscious of the phrase.

Related to the above discussion, critical friend 2 (04/03/2005, p.7) reinforced the importance of identifying the difference between managing the school or leading the school. He indicated that one of the things that he valued in principals that he had worked with is that they make conscious decisions and will continue to make decisions. Simply put, leaders make decisions.



*A simple analogy could be that leaders support the development of an organisational climate that supports the creation of knowledge whereas managers are responsible for the collection, dissemination and storage of information.*

Critical friend 1 (04/03/2005, p.12) identified that, in my analysis I had written, I was undertaking a critical analysis of my management practices through the lens of knowledge management. He raised the question of whether I would measure my management practices against other individuals or even against other styles. In response I identified that I was not measuring my practices against those of a particular individual, though the behaviours of principals that I had previously worked with must have some influence on my analysis. (critical friend conversation, 04/03/2005, p.12).



*Upon reflection, artefact 15, coming nearly 10 months after our first critical friend conversation provided clear evidence that my critical friends were aware of changes in my practice. Our dialogues, my engagement with the knowledge management discourse and the scenario group conversations had all influenced my understanding of my practice and the worldviews underpinning my practice. In particular, the scenario group survey, its development and the conversations that it supported played a central role in clarifying my thinking about my knowledge related practices.*

Critical friend 1 (04/03/2005, p.14) developed the concept of trust and expanded the conversation to explore loyalty. He indicated that loyalty could be a logical development from trust. Loyalty within an organisational context could have negative consequences. Artefact 16 highlights the potential negative impacts of loyalty for an administrator within an educational context. Loyalty could be defined as unquestioning trust, critical friend 2 (04/03/2005, p.15) identified the concept of misguided loyalty. There would appear to be a healthy tension between trust and loyalty within an organisational context.

**Artefact 16. Critical friend conversation (04/03/2005, p.14).**

CF1:	And then if you want to take that a step further, in any institution could loyalty sometimes lead to unsound and unproductive practices? If you took it too far.
Paul D:	Yep. That's what's happened in this place I would say, you know, the amount --
CF1:	Yeah well see you said that when. I suppose that's where I was going.
Paul D:	Yes, but we're all too comfortable.
CF1:	Yeah.
CF2:	Or, I think you raised it and Paul's recorded it here, where some loyalty, it's very easy for loyalty to the person, particularly given that leader or boss's approach, how they use their power, it is very easy for a boss to surround them with loyal yes people, yes men, and as a consequence of that --
CF1:	Make bad decisions.
CF2:	The potential is to make and then have those bad decisions validated by that group.



*Being conscious of the potential pitfalls of loyalty could allow an administrator to see benefits in situations where their behaviour and decisions are challenged.*

*Within an organisational environment where knowledge creation was encouraged challenge and dissent should be viewed as an essential component of the creation process and a sign of a healthy organisation. Conflict should not be avoided at all costs but rather be allowed to occur within certain organisational parameters, for example, respect for the individual. As an administrator I should adopt strategies to encourage dialogue with organisational members outside my group of 'trusted confidants'.*

### 5.8.3 Methodology

I outlined the authentication process that I would use with each of the scenario groups. I highlighted the process that I would use in cycle 2 scenario group conversations where the individual groups would critique the draft model that had been developed from the original scenario group conversations. The critical friends endorsed this approach and supported my research plan that provided for closure by the end of 2005.

## 5.9 LEARNINGS

The following are a list of key learnings and questions that I derived from the critical friend conversations. There is no significance in the order of placement.

- From a knowledge management perspective it is the context within which the knowledge management activity is being undertaken which is vital (Snowden, 2002b).
- The social interaction associated with conversations provides a learning process supporting the transformation of existing knowledge into new knowledge. Subsequently individuals continually create and re-create meaning as a result of their relationship with others in the social environment (Vygotsky, 1978).
- In my investigative activities I must be continually conscious of the difference between the truth of power and the power of truth.

- Sharing knowledge is an individual decision controlled by four influences. The primary influence is the individual's worldview of knowledge. While the secondary influence is the 3 filters: relationships, need and context.
- Decision making is linked with knowledge management with the focus being the holistic act of decision making rather than simply the provision of information to support decision making.
- Any measure of my effectiveness must not only reflect my personal judgements but also judgements made by individuals within the scenario groups against the indicators suggested in the scenario group survey.
- There would appear to be ongoing questions related to how much knowledge is shared between organisational members, to whom within the organisation this personal knowledge is shared and how existing levels of trust influence practices linked to both information sharing and knowledge creation.
- Learning also requires trust. Conditions inside an organisation that can influence levels of trust include the type of tasks, organisational structure, type of leadership, culture, processes of interaction and patterns of communication (Nooteboom & Six, 2003).
- An analogy could be that leaders support the development of an organisational climate that supports the creation of knowledge whereas managers are responsible for the collection, dissemination and storage of information.

In summary, the critical friend conversations helped me to clarify my exact area of investigation, my approach to this investigation and provided the opportunities for professional dialogue. This professional dialogue supported reflection and clarification of my theoretical and practical understanding of knowledge and its creation.

## **6 PHASE 2 - CYCLE 1 SCENARIO GROUP CONVERSATIONS**

In this chapter I have analysed the evidence collected from my conversations with a number of groups and individuals situated within different scenarios in the school. The conversations were cycle 1 of the action research proper. In chapter 3 I identified that the term scenario was used to indicate the particular situation in which I am positioned as an administrator. Chapter 3 also outlined the role of scenario groups in determining other people's realities of my professional practice and justified the selection of the specific scenario groups. Chapter 3 also provided justifications for the use of conversations as an investigative method to gather data that supported the clarification of each individual's reality of my practice. The scenario conversations were undertaken with 3 groups and one individual participant. The participants were:

- the members of the Students at Risk group;
- the executive team;
- the Heads of Department; and
- a union representative.

The conversations were undertaken over a period of several months with the timing of the conversations controlled by the availability of the individuals and groups involved. Participation by individuals in the conversations was completely voluntary. The conversations with each scenario group were undertaken in two stages:

- data collection stage; and
- analysis authentication.

At the commencement of the data collection stage I provided each group member with an ethics consent form, a project information sheet and a research survey. I then outlined the research topic and provided definitions for key terms applied to the research. As facilitator I was conscious to exert a minimal influence on the direction of the conversation and in most situations the scenario group survey, explained in chapter 3, scaffolded the conversations.

I adopted the following common framework to support the analysis of each conversation:

- conversation background;
- the scenario group survey;
- conversation concept map;
- the conversation;
- final thoughts; and
- authentication.

The trustworthiness of my analysis was built upon the authentication process undertaken with each scenario group. Each group was engaged in a process where all analysis associated with their group was made available for authentication. Amendments identified during the authentication process were completed and elaborations made by group members during the process were recorded.

A reminder to the reader that just as in chapters 4 and 5, the italicized sections of writing are points of personal reflection related to the analysis of the conversations. An icon has also been placed in the page margins to indicate the sections of personal reflection.

## 6.1 STUDENTS AT RISK GROUP CONVERSATION

The primary Students at Risk scenario group conversation was undertaken on 28 October, 2004. The authentication conversation was undertaken on 27 May, 2005. The conversation was transcribed by a secretarial service and no attempt was made to accurately identify the individual participants, subsequently the referencing of quotes has been linked to specific pages of the conversation transcript. The transcription of the conversation is available from the author upon request.

### 6.1.1 *Background*

In chapter 3 I identified the students at risk group as a group of teaching staff with a concern for the welfare of individual students who were identified as being at risk of prematurely disengaging from the educational system. The group consisted of 8 members including myself acting as chairperson of the group weekly meetings. Involvement by teachers in the students at risk group was voluntary. The group had operated for 2 years prior to the conversation.

### 6.1.2 *The Scenario Group Survey*

I have previously indicated in chapter 3 that the survey was developed for qualitative analysis purposes and as a framework for the conversation. The analysis of the survey responses was seen as being indicative of teachers' opinions of my professional practice. The survey compensated for the challenge that group members found in critically commenting on my professional practice. The responses to the survey questions are indicated in Appendix 2 and should be viewed in conjunction with the 'examples of behaviours' listed in the survey (Appendix 1). I had developed the examples of behaviours in consultation with my critical friends. The examples proved to be both an aid for the survey completion by the conversation participants and a self check for me.

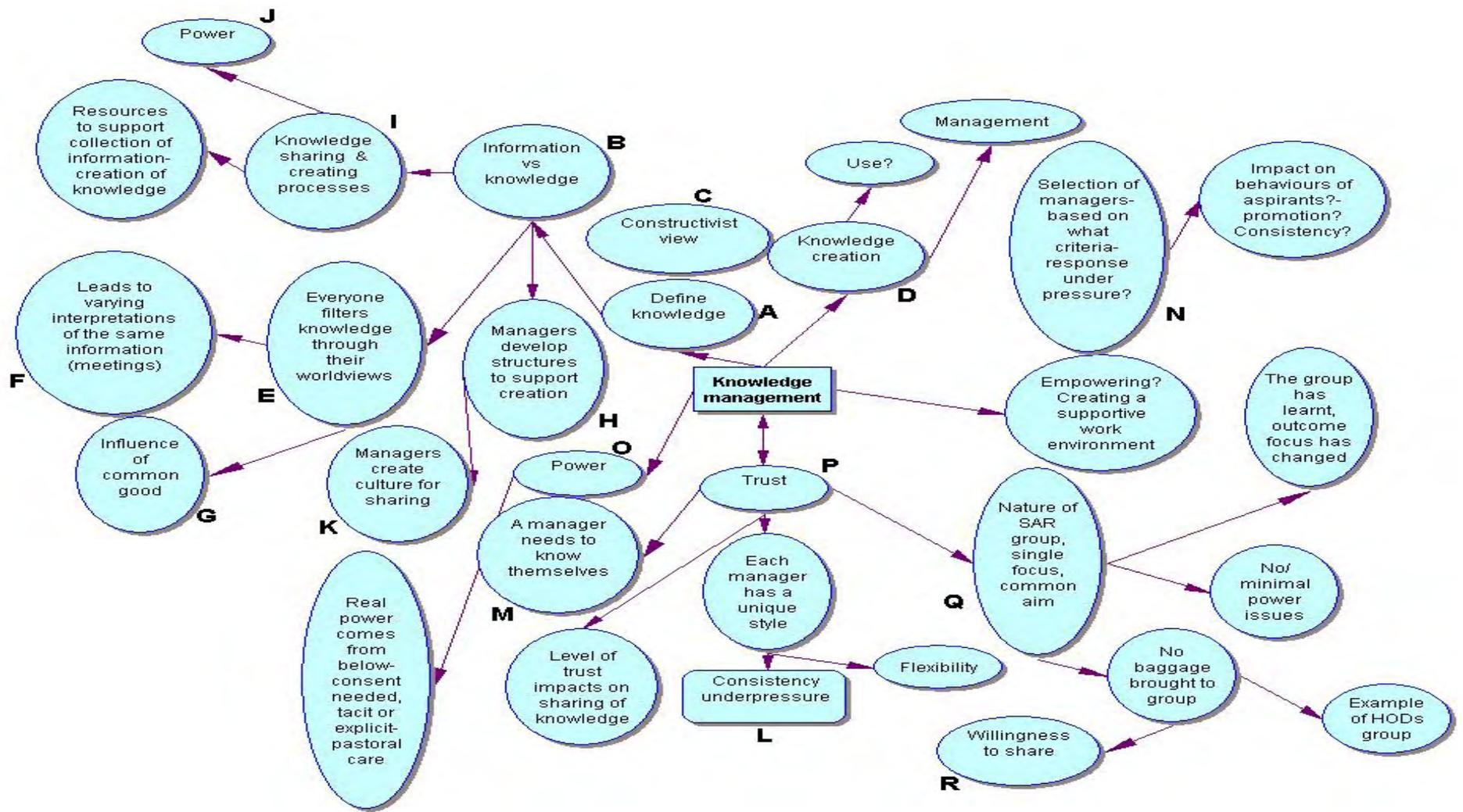
Analysis of the completed surveys by this group indicated that possible areas for improvement in my professional practice were:

- support for the collection and analysis of information; and
- encouragement for the development of trust and respect between individuals.

The survey responses indicated the variety of conceptualisations that individuals had of knowledge management. They ranged from the collection of information to the social process of shared dialogue.

### *6.1.3 The concept map*

The concept map was developed with the group during the conversation. The concept map provides a summary of the key themes and issues that I identified in the conversation. The map serves as a point of reference and clarification for the reader and an analysis tool for the researcher. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A). The authenticity of this summarisation is addressed later in the analysis of this conversation.



Concept Map 6. Students at Risk Conversation, 28 October 2004.

#### 6.1.4 *The conversation*

At the outset of the conversation the group worked to develop a common understanding of the terms information and knowledge, and the relationship between these terms. The group supported the simple concept that information was shared and knowledge was created or constructed (A). The acceptance of this view was evidenced throughout the conversation (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, A, p.1, 4, 6, 9: B p.5, 7). There was agreement that making explicit and sharing an individual's knowledge was an example of transforming knowledge to information (B). Information only again became knowledge when individuals engaged with the information and subsequently created or constructed their own knowledge (C, D).



*The relationship between information and knowledge is a reflection of the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) with its focus on the movement of knowledge between tacit and explicit states through the processes of socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation.*

The group agreed that individuals filter the receipt of information and the construction of knowledge through their worldviews (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.7) (E). One result of this filtering was evidenced at staff meetings where worldviews result in contrasting interpretations of the same information (F). The different interpretations cause unintentional misunderstandings and disagreements and lead to differing implementation of organisational policies and processes. There was the suggestion that outcomes of the filtering through worldviews are tempered by the influence of common good (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, A p.3) (G).



*Common good could be also identified as humanity, as discussed in critical friend conversation (2/11/2004, p.3). Common good could also be conceptualised as common need.*

It was suggested that individual managers have their unique management style. A manager's style could be evidenced in the way that they deal with people (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.1) (H). It was identified that different managers employed different methods of sharing information with organisational members and creating

knowledge (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.1) (I). An administrator could intentionally or unintentionally impact on the creation of knowledge within the organisation. Administrators have the power, within their organisation, to influence the provision of resources that support the collection and processing of information (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, A p.4) (J). Specific resources identified were information technology and human resources.

Issues related to power were discussed. Administrators have the power to influence the distribution of information and the creation of knowledge through their support for the fostering of an organisational culture that values sharing (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, A p.8) (K). An administrator's support for such a culture can be evidenced by the creation of organisational structures and systems that support these processes.

The consistency of behaviour displayed by individual managers, particularly their consistency when under pressure was identified as significant (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B, p.2) (L). The group expressed the opinion that it was vital for a manager to truly understand themselves (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.2) (M). As an example of the significance that the group placed on a manager's behaviour under pressure, they questioned the selection criteria for school based administrators and challenged what selection criteria embraced an individual's response under pressure (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.3) (N).



*What is my practice like when I am placed under pressure? Is this related to my personal resilience? How closely is consistency of behaviour linked to relationships and trust?*

The group also discussed power from the perspective of them being individually empowered to perform their duties and make decisions (O). This feeling of empowerment comes when administrators create a supportive work environment. A contrasting view was put that real power was seen to come from below in the school, that is, consent was required from the teachers if an organisational change was to be successful (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, A, p. 1; B, p. 2). A teacher's consent may

be explicitly expressed but would more likely be tacitly expressed (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.5).

Trust was also identified as being an influence on the management of knowledge (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, A p.8) (P). The sharing of knowledge was seen to be strongly influenced by the levels of trust that exist within the group (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.2). Artefact 17 highlights a suggested relationship between trust and the sharing of knowledge.

**Artefact 17. Students at Risk conversation (28/10/2004, B p.2).**

Female	I think trust should be, again, from the knowledge management not from the power. Because trust is something that's two-way, and it comes from knowledge.
Female	Yeah, and if you don't trust, you don't share. If you don't share your knowledge, you don't trust the source that, you know.

Trust within the group was also seen to be influenced by the history and purpose of the group (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.5). In the context of this group they initially came together as volunteers in a working group with the single aim of supporting students at educational risk (Students at Risk, 28/10/2004, B p.8) (Q). It was suggested that there was no personal baggage brought to the group, there were minimal power issues associated with the group and there was a willingness to share (R). The original focus of the group was the collection of information about individual students. Conversation was the primary tool used in the creation of shared knowledge about individual students. The shared knowledge was employed to initiate and support intervention strategies for individual students.

*6.1.5 Authentication*

Authentication of my analysis of the students at risk conversation occurred on the 27 May, 2005. Five of the original conversation participants attended the authentication conversation and one member provided his apology. Minutes of the authentication meeting were kept as a summary of the key issues raised. I indicated to the group

that if there were significant issues which they wished to elaborate upon these should be identified in our next conversation which would be taped and transcribed.

To facilitate authentication the participants in the original conversation were provided with photocopies of my analysis prior to this conversation and access to the conversation transcripts during the conversation. Their verification of my analysis was indicated by members signing their copies of my analysis. All participating members authenticated my analysis and acknowledged that the conversational concept map provided an audit trail for the original conversation. All participants remarked that even though there had been a significant period of time had elapsed since the original conversation an indication of the authenticity of my analysis was that the written analysis stimulated their memory of the conversation. One member who could not participate in the authentication conversation provided me with feedback and authenticated my analysis.

During the authentication conversation the participants reinforced a number of issues as being significant. In particular the significance of trust and power within the operation of the group were highlighted (authentication minutes, 27/05/2005). One member indicated that the statement identifying that there was no baggage brought by members in the group's formative stage, was highly significant in explaining why negative influences of power were not significant within the group. It was identified that we operated as a group of equals and my power position as an administrator was not obvious and did not provide significant negative influences.

As members discussed the importance of power and trust within the broader organisation, individuals very quickly moved to recount stories about their experiences of school administrators abusing power and trust. When I identified their story telling behaviour to the group the supported response was that 'stories are how we create our knowledge and story telling has had this function over the ages' (Students at Risk, authentication minutes, 27/05/2005). The sharing of information through story telling was accepted as normal organisational learning behaviour.

I questioned why they thought that decision making had not been identified as an issue during the original group discussion. There was general agreement that this

was not an issue within the group because decisions made by the group were either reached through the sharing of information and discussion to make a consensus decision either for action or as a recommendation to another member or group within the organisation.



*Is this an outcome of the decision type and the context of the group? Based on the critical friend model of three types of decision making, this is an example of a decision being made after appropriate consultation. The primary role of the group as outlined in the group's terms of reference is to work with students at risk. The group does not have a significant involvement in policy making.*

The timing of the authentication process was also valuable because it served to refresh the group members in preparation for the next scenario group conversation, held on 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2005 which examined my summary model as discussed in chapter 7.

#### *6.1.6 Summary of issues for further consideration*

The challenge for me was to draw some sense from this conversation. Concept map 6 provides an overview of the key issues identified in the conversation. The following points are presented as a summary of my reflections on the key issues identified in the analysis of this conversation.

- Issues identified in the critical friend conversations also surfaced in this conversation. Common issues included power, trust, managerial style and the influence of humanity or common good.
- Issues discussed that were identified in the literature but were not previously discussed included: clarification of the differences between information and knowledge, the construction of knowledge, the filtering influence of individual worldviews, and the context and need of the group.
- The relationship between information and knowledge is a reflection of the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) with its focus on the movement of knowledge between tacit and explicit states through the processes of socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. Conversation is central to this process of knowledge creation.

## 6.2 EXECUTIVE CONVERSATION

The primary conversation with the executive group was undertaken on 2 November. The authentication conversation was undertaken on 6 June 2005. The transcription and analysis processes employed were as used in the students at risk scenario group conversation. The referencing of quotes has been linked to specific pages in the transcripts and no attempt has been made to attribute quotes to individual speakers. The transcription of the conversation is provided as available from the author upon request.

### 6.2.1 *Background*

As I identified in chapter 3, those members of the school's executive management team involved in the conversation were the Principal and the 3 Deputy Principals (including me). The executive team has responsibility for the prioritisation, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the key processes within the organisation. Involvement of executive members in the conversation was voluntary. A significant challenge in facilitating this interview was overcoming the time demands placed on all members of the executive and the identification of a suitable time when all members were able to participate in the conversation.

### 6.2.2 *The concept map*

The concept map was developed after the conversation. The concept map provides a summary of the key themes and issues that I identified in the conversation. The map serves as a point of reference and clarification for the reader and an analysis tool for the researcher. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A). The authenticity of this summarisation is addressed later in the analysis of this conversation.

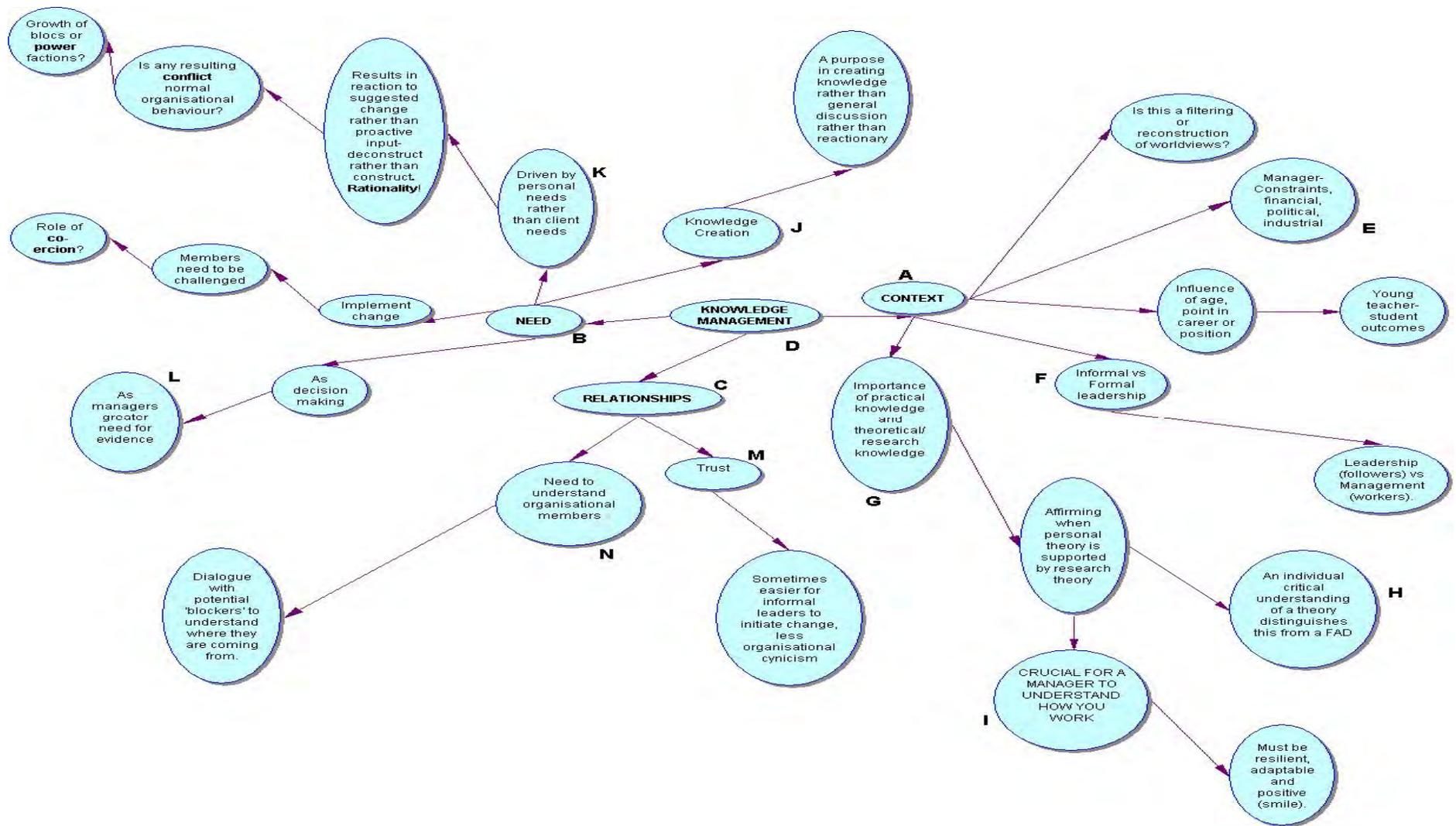
### 6.2.3 *The Scenario Group Survey*

As I have indicated previously the scenario group survey was not used for quantitative analysis purposes. The analysis was seen as being indicative rather than

significant. The survey compensated for the challenge that group members found in critically commenting on my professional practice. A summary of responses to the survey questions is provided in the Appendix 2 and should be viewed in conjunction with the 'examples of behaviours' listed in the survey (Appendix 1). Analysis of the completed surveys by this group indicated that possible areas for improvement in my professional practice were:

- demonstrate the open sharing of important knowledge; and
- involve key people in important decisions.

In defining knowledge management executive responses to the survey reflected a core humanistic view of knowledge management with descriptors including sharing, listening and learning. Examples of knowledge management within the organisation embraced Information and Communication tools such as the internet, intra-net, e-mails and forums.



Concept Map 7. Executive Conversation, 2 November 2004.

#### 6.2.4 *The conversation*

After providing the standard backgrounding to the group (as discussed in the introduction to this section) I spent time engaging their thinking on how knowledge management was situated within the role of leadership. The group had the scenario group survey to provide a scaffold for the conversation. As an added stimulus for conversation I provided the group with an outline of Glover's (2002) model of Adaptive Leadership (Artefact 18). I had not previously shared this model with my critical friends or other scenario groups. I specifically presented this model to the executive group as I believed that as the formal leaders in the school they would appreciate a model which identified where managing knowledge could be situated within a leadership framework. Knowledge management is one of four principles of Adaptive Leadership. I also believed that executive members could provide critical comment on Glover's model.

#### **Artefact 18. Adaptive Leadership Framework (Glover, 2002).**

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Please consult the hardcopy thesis  
available from the QUT Library

In the analysis of this conversation I have applied a framework that draws upon the factors influencing knowledge management as identified by Snowden (2002a) and discussed by the critical friends (critical friend conversation, 02/11/2004). The framework incorporates:

- Context (A);

- Need (B); and
- Relationships (C).

## **Context**

In analysing the conversation I looked for issues in this section associated with the context in which an administrator operates and has to create or manage knowledge.

The synergy between the leadership role of the group members and the framework provided by the Adaptive Leadership model (Glover, 2002) focused the conversation on knowledge management as a component of the leadership role of an educational administrator (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.1) (D). It was acknowledged that knowledge management and creation does not occur in a context free environment. It was suggested that we are ‘driven by financial constraints, political constraints, industrial constraints, so therefore our use and application of knowledge can be controlled because of other external factors’ (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.2) (E). Influences from outside the school were highlighted as providing a context of particular challenges for operating in our specific workplace, ‘we’re charged with the responsibility of showing leadership and knowledge management in the organisation externally – we haven’t got the full picture of what the knowledge is, yet we’re charged with the responsibility coming from...’ (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.9).

The context of formal and informal leadership was identified (F). The idea of engaging the informal leaders was acknowledged as an important part of building and using knowledge. ‘...opportunities for leadership – like, you can’t assume are at the top at this level, you have to accept and encourage the leadership that’s taking place at other levels. There’s going to be different leaders at different times and different places. And part of management and leadership is encouraging those other leadership activities to occur’ (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.6). Artefact 19 highlights the potential level of influence that an informal leader can exert and identifies that the context of formal leadership can reduce an individual’s capacity to influence within the organisation.

**Artefact 19. Executive conversation (02/11/2004, p. 2).**

Male	Well I actually feel that I have more impact as an informal leader than I do as a formal leader. There's this notion that if you hold a position, you have power, you have influence, you have capacity to make things happen. Where, in fact, I actually felt that I achieved more before I was actually appointed into a formal leadership role. Because I could do things, I could work with individuals, I could try things. If it didn't work, a lot of cases, the formal knowledge in the organisation wasn't even aware of it. But then, if I did find a solution, I did find something that was actually good, I could actually influence those around me that I worked with and I was not seen as a threat, I was seen as someone who's actually doing and probably have regard. Whereas, when you're in a formal position...
Female	You're restrained.

Individuals made a number of comments about their personal views on the relationship between professional practice (praxis) and the construction of new knowledge (G). Artefact 20 highlights one member's view on the importance of externally derived theory on their praxis.

**Artefact 20. Executive conversation (02/11/2004, p.2).**

I think the question, the issue of whether your own experience, I think that, to some extent your knowledge of the role [and] the organisation is important but I don't think that you can rest solely on that because I think having that, some knowledge base to driving decision-making is important, I think we need that. You know, if you have research you can call on that indicates that this supports a position that you're taking, I'm finding that even more important as I develop as a leader.' Similarly 'it's sometimes encouraging when your own personal views that you have, you find that they are supported by formal research that's going on. It's an affirmation for the way you do things.

In responding to my question suggesting that management discourses such as knowledge management and organisational learning are fads one member responded that 'I think you've got to examine the strengths within a lot of those so-called fads and, again, see how you would use them personally as a leader, or with the people that you're working with' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.7) (H). Another member expressed the view that in some contexts it could be an example of faddism. 'I think some do because they're reaching for help and just not getting the help or the support where they are. So in desperation they do grab for those sorts of things and

try and live by a particular doctrine even if it doesn't suit their personality type' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.8).

Similarly another member expressed the view that 'the more you read about management, leadership, all of those sort of things are finely intertwined and they're mixed and one theorist will use their research to argue, no, it's more about this and - I think it's more about you understanding how you work and how you work with people and trying to work out how you can best work with the people that you are with but have some sort of common approach to those people as well' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.7) (I). The critical examination of other discourse frameworks also allows you to learn about self.



*When an administrator draws upon key messages from management discourse, be they, academic research or populist writing, is the administrator a potential victim of management faddism? The administrator would only be a victim if they uncritically adopted the messages into their professional practice. In doing this they risk ignoring the significant influence of context, need and relationships on the practical implementation of any management discourse. Does the possession of a critical understanding of a management theory by a manager rather than a superficial or shallow understanding of the theory distinguish this from a fad? If an administrator was to engage in ongoing structured dialogue with a critical friend who had a critical understanding of the theory would this negate issues associated with faddism? Reflection supported by theory and/or fad appears to be integral to an administrator developing a better understanding of 'self'.*

## **NEED**

In analysing the conversation I also looked for issues associated with the need for an administrator to create or manage knowledge (J). I argue that the existence of a need provides the motivation to collect data, generate information and subsequently create knowledge. Another perspective on knowledge creation within the school was that 'it seems that we stop, we've got data and we've got information and we try to put information out there so that it's available for all. But at what point does that

information turn into knowledge? And at what point, then, is that knowledge managed by the people, you know, the light comes on and it is no longer information but knowledge that they start to use in practice. How do we get to that?' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p. 5).

The lack of understanding of whose need is being met by the creation of specific knowledge or why specific knowledge is being created may explain the organisational behaviour frequently displayed in the school (K). 'When we go to create the knowledge, people seem to wait for us to put something out there. When you ask for feedback there's no feedback, but when you then draw some conclusions and come up with a draft policy, then out it comes, it's a knowledge destruction or reconstruction, rather than a knowledge construction' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.4).

However within an organisation there can be competing needs that will influence the creation of knowledge and the application of that knowledge through decision making. An observation was made by one executive member that, 'in the first instance, I believe that the knowledge that's used in the application of processes and procedures within the school, has been developed around the knowledge of the individuals that suits how they wish to operate. I don't believe the knowledge, in a substantial way, has been developed in response to the needs of external client, customer, students, families' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.3). The clarification of the specific need for the creation of knowledge is crucial as this will determine information that must be gathered and the identification of the criteria on which a decision would be based. In clarifying need, one executive member indicated 'that's part of getting some meaningful knowledge base and challenge perception with some, if you've got some hard data that says, well, the reality is this, this doesn't match the perception that you have of the situation' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.5). It was suggested that deconstruction of perceptions (worldviews) could work both ways and that as leaders we should be involved in creating teachers' personal realities (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.5).

Professional accountability is a significant and mandated need for administrators, 'there's an expectation in terms of accountability on people in formal positions to provide evidence to substantiate argument...' (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.1) (L). For an administrator accountability can be the catalyst for knowledge creating behaviours.



*Perhaps the construction or creation of knowledge isn't always a pleasant experience for stakeholders. Savage knowledge deconstruction might be much better than no engagement in the construction of new knowledge as evidenced in some cases of policy development within the school.*

*Challenging an individual teacher's reality or worldview can sometimes lead to tensions and extreme outcomes as discussed in the issues associated with the teacher's suicide during the reconnaissance phase of my research. Could such action be construed as coercion? Could it be viewed as workplace bullying? The challenge for an administrator trying to influence knowledge creation is how should the creation process be facilitated? Is this supporting Snowden's (2002a) comments on the assumption of rationality? Should the organisational conflict associated with the deconstruction of one person's or a group's knowledge be viewed as normal organisational behaviour? As an administrator should I welcome other's active engagement with my attempt to make my knowledge explicit rather than view the critique as a personal challenge and be confronted by this challenge? Such a view has linkages to Grundy's (1996) definition of trust discussed in chapter 2- 'what is needed is confidence that an individual's challenge will be interpreted as challenging the idea, the assertion, and the evidence, not the person'. However what can frequently evolve from the challenges are blocks of individuals with similar opinions or constructs who join together to lobby their position. The lobbying gives rise to personal tensions and challenges for an administrator working to facilitate the creation of knowledge. Under these challenges it is easy for an administrator to lose perspective and their decision making capacity to be impaired.*

## Relationships

In analysing the conversation I also looked for issues where relationships were seen to influence the capacity for an administrator to influence the creation or management of knowledge.

One identified linkage to relationships was the influence that a position of formal leadership can exert on trust. It was suggested (executive conversation, 2/11/2004, p.2) that ‘when you are in a formal position there’s cultural cynicism around. Oh, that’s their job, they’ve got to say that. And even if you do have information there’s still cynicism and an element of distrust’ (M).

The significance of relationships between informal and formal leaders within the school was also identified. Conversations with informal leaders, particularly those with different organisational agendas and contrasting worldviews were highlighted as important (executive conversation, 2/11/2004, p.6). In identifying their approach to conversation with a significant informal leader within the school, one executive member indicated, ‘we still have conversations with him, I still go and talk with him... want to find a bit more about. I think that’s the thing, you’ve got to make that link. It may not be your position, your belief or your style, but if you sit there and say, well, I don’t agree with that, the person who’s got that view never knows that you don’t agree with them unless you go and talk to them. So I think it’s important to link it back to those people that the others in the organisation see as leaders at particular times’ (N).



*The significance of dialogue, relationship and trust were identified. What was also highlighted was the challenge that confronted formal leaders as they sought to build trust with school staff but had to constantly overcome cynicism and suspicion associated with the position of formal leadership.*

### 6.2.5 Authentication

Authentication of my analysis of the Executive conversation occurred on 6 June 2005. All three of the original conversation participants attended the authentication

conversation. Unlike the other authentication conversations this conversation was undertaken immediately prior to the second cycle Executive scenario group's conversation related to the summary model of knowledge creation. The variation was caused by the extreme difficulty in arranging a common time for all members of executive to be able to participate in the authentication process. I requested that any significant issues that they wished to discuss as a result of reading my analysis could be highlighted during the taped model review conversation that was to be held immediately following the authentication process. Minutes of the authentication meeting were kept and key issues raised were identified.

To facilitate authentication the participants in the original conversation were provided with photocopies of my analysis prior to this conversation and access to the conversation transcripts during the conversation. To indicate their verification of my analysis all members signed their copies of my analysis. A number of issues were identified by the participants during the authentication conversation and also written on their signed copies of the analysis. The participants endorsed the accuracy of my analysis and provided elaboration on a number of issues. The issues outlined in the following paragraphs provided further grounds for reflection on my practice.

In response to my comments on the relationship between professional practice (praxis) and the construction of new knowledge it was reinforced that both of these could be influenced by externally derived theory through formal research on various leadership models. New knowledge could also stem from other professionals that you have worked with and upon whom you may have modelled your own leadership or their leadership style may have influenced your professional practice.

The question was raised as to when does information and data become knowledge that can be used as a platform for further action. The challenge was identified of how much engagement individual members of staff must have with available information before an administrator can assume that there is some personal knowledge. Also for consideration was the quantity and type of interaction that needs to occur between individuals and groups within the school so that the existence of a shared understanding can be assumed.



*A similar question was also raised and discussed during the second conversation with the Students at Risk Group (28/10/2004, A, p.8) and also by the union representative (02/11/2004, p.2) during the initial scenario group conversation. As an administrator I often make assumptions about the level of individual knowledge and shared understanding that exists when I am facilitating discussions and consultations. Consequently I need to be conscious of professional practices that allow checks to be made on the levels of understanding that exist. When I am challenging another person's reality or worldview, I must be sure that as a leader I am also prepared to challenge my own worldviews and/or to have them challenged by others. The challenging needs to be accepted as occurring in 2 directions; from me and of me.*

#### *6.2.6 Summary of issues for further consideration*

Concept map 7 provides an overview of the key issues identified in the conversation. The following points are presented as a summary of my reflections on the key issues identified in the analysis of this conversation.

- The framework of context, needs and relationship appears to provide a suitable framework for the analysis of the executive scenario group conversation. It provides evidence related to the professional practice of an administrator when viewed through the lens of a contemporary knowledge management discourse.
- Knowledge management and creation does not occur in a context free environment. Knowledge management is situated as a component of the leadership role of an educational administrator (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.1).
- Administrators could be accused of faddism if they uncritically adopted the key messages from a management discourse into their professional practice.
- The existence of a need provides the motivation to collect data, generate information and subsequently create knowledge.
- The construction or creation of knowledge may not be a pleasant experience for stakeholders. When an administrator challenges an individual teacher's reality or worldview this can sometimes lead to tensions and personal

discomfort for both parties. The practice of the administrator can be construed as coercion and workplace bullying. Are the tensions and conflict associated with savage knowledge deconstruction better than no engagement in the construction of knowledge?

- The significance of dialogue, relationship and trust were identified.
- Administrators are confronted by the challenge that, as they seek to build trust with school staff, they have to constantly overcome the cynicism and suspicion associated with their position of formal leadership. Trust is evidenced when an individual's challenge is interpreted as challenging the idea, the assertion, and the evidence, and not the person (Grundy, 1996).
- Administrators make risky assumptions about the level of shared understanding that exists when they facilitate knowledge creation consultations. Administrators need to be conscious of professional checks that can be made on the levels of understanding that exist. When challenging another person's reality or worldview, administrators must be sure that they are prepared to challenge their own worldviews and/or to have them challenged by others.

### 6.3 HEADS OF DEPARTMENT CONVERSATION

The conversation with the Heads of Department (HODS) had significant differences in structure and context when compared to the other previously analysed conversations. My plan had been to undertake the conversation at the same time as the other scenario group conversations, however the identification of a mutually agreeable time was continually blocked by heavy work loads associated with the end of the school year. In the intervening period before the conversation I was involved in a sharp verbal exchange with one HOD. The exchange caused me to change my conversation timelines with this group and significantly influenced the context within which this scenario group conversation occurred. The exchange occurred while the group was discussing the implementation of a new organisational policy during a HOD meeting in November, 2004. During the meeting the discussion reached a point where I articulated the view that I was becoming tired of the negativity and obstruction demonstrated towards new initiatives by some HODs. The particular HOD responded forcefully that after all the work that we did as a group we could still not make decisions.

The statement personally stung me as I believed that as a group we were reasonably effective at making decisions about issues over which we had governance. It challenged my views of my effectiveness as an administrator as I believed that I had worked with the group to develop better knowledge creation capacity. The HODs statement challenged some of my very strongly held worldviews. At that stage of the meeting I did not want to increase the level of tension in an already tense meeting so I indicated to the group that after the Christmas break we would discuss our group decision making behaviour. I believed that this discussion could be facilitated in such a manner to explore both decision making and knowledge management. The discussion could replace my planned research conversation with the group.

#### *6.3.1 Background to the conversation*

Subsequently at the first HOD meeting in 2005 I revisited our previous discussion related to the group's decision making expertise. I outlined that I had not forgotten my undertaking from the previous year to facilitate a special meeting with the group

to allow us to work through the issues associated with our decision making. Being conscious of the heavy work loads at the commencement of the school year I allowed 2 more weeks to elapse. At the next HOD meeting I negotiated a mutually convenient time for the conversation to occur. I also indicated that I would like their consent for the conversation to be used in my research and their approval for me to tape the conversation for subsequent transcription. We agreed to meet at a particular date and time and that I would confirm the venue. I briefly outlined my research topic and methodology. At this point there was some concern expressed about taping the conversation. Subsequent to the meeting I e-mailed the HODs to confirm, date, time and place for the meeting and requesting that if any members were not comfortable with the taping of the meeting would they please contact me.

Shortly after I sent the e-mail the challenges of what I was attempting to undertake became apparent. I was contacted by three of the HODs who expressed grave reservations about the meeting being taped and transcribed. The following questions summarise their common concerns.

- What was the purpose of the meeting, work or research?
- Was participation in the meeting compulsory?
- What form would the meeting take?
- Who would have access to the recording and the transcript?

In response to their concerns I met with the three HODs and responded to their specific concerns by identifying that the primary focus of the meeting was work, that participation was not compulsory, that the meeting would take the form of a conversation and that I would be the only person who had access to the record of the conversation. I outlined my research methodology and supported my explanation with examples of previous conversation transcripts, notations on the transcripts and conversational concept maps. I went to great lengths to present the view that the conversation topic (decision making) and the research focus (knowledge creation/management) were very closely linked and that there was a natural fit between work and my research.

After these clarifications and explanations each of the concerned HODs was still not comfortable with the taping of our conversation. They indicated that if they attended and the meeting was taped they would not speak. I saw this outcome as unproductive for both the group and my research. From an organisational perspective I believed that the conversation was a meaningful way for the group to reflect upon their practice particularly upon their decision making capacity. From a researcher perspective I saw an enhanced value in the conversation being a 'real life' rather than a staged research conversation. After further discussion, the concerned HODs agreed to participate in the conversation on the understanding that the construction of a concept map was the only record of the conversation used in the research. By employing data show technology all participants in the conversation were able to participate in the development of the concept map during the conversation.

I provided an undertaking to each of the three concerned HODs on what I would specifically write about their comments. Each of the three HODs agreed to allow me to identify their reservations within my research narrative. Their major reservations were:

- the conversation being taped;
- the general issues of concern mentioned previously; and
- their unwillingness to take the risk of their comments being sourced.

However they clearly stated that they did not want a closer examination of the issues behind their concerns.



*At that stage of my research the situation with some of the members of the group caused me significant personal angst. Had I made a poor decision in trying to blend the work focussed discussion with the research conversation? Was a lack of trust toward me an underlying reason behind the reticence at having the conversation taped? Were the concerns being expressed the first visible impact of my positional power on the research? What would happen during the conversation? Would the conversation be a waste of time for everybody concerned?*

*As I indicated in chapter 3 the use of the living theory approach to action research would allow me as an administrator undertaking research within my workplace to*

*consider the influence of my positional power on the validity of my research findings and on the determination of truth. In this situation, as a researcher I was being forced to consider meaning in terms of relations of struggle embodied in everyday practice and in the local contexts (Jennings & Graham, 1996). For some of the HODs the conversation was being influenced by power issues (McNiff, 2000). Power being viewed as relationships rather than the singular term power and as such it is associated with practices, techniques and procedures (Foucault, 1980). The relationship between power and knowledge is acknowledged by Foucault, (1980) who suggested that they are dimensions of the same practices and social relations with power informing knowledge and producing discourse.*

*These reflections were impacting on me as I prepared for the conversation and stood this conversation apart from the other scenario conversations.*

The inability to tape and transcribe the conversation resulted in a variation to my data collection and analysis processes. For this conversation I provided an introduction as indicated in Appendix 3. The introduction clearly outlined to the participants, the purpose of the conversation, identified the research documentation that I would provide, clarified the conversational protocols and suggested a number of framework questions to scaffold the conversation.

My previous experience in the difficulties of trying to simultaneously facilitate a conversation and construct a concept map led me to negotiate for one of the HODs to facilitate the conversation while I constructed the concept map. Not being the conversation facilitator gave me more freedom in developing the concept map, and also moved the focus of the conversation from me to the facilitator and perhaps reduced the power influences that could be associated with my facilitation of the conversation.

### *6.3.2 The survey*

As I have indicated previously the scenario group survey was not used for quantitative analysis purposes but more to compensate for the challenge that group

members found in critically commenting on my professional practice. The survey also provided a scaffold for our conversation.

The survey analysis should be seen as indicative rather than significant. The survey results are provided in Appendix 2 and should be viewed in conjunction with the 'examples of behaviours' listed in the survey (Appendix 1). Analysis of the completed surveys by this group indicated that there was no single behaviour which all HODs believed that I 'usually' demonstrated. Survey responses made it apparent that improvement could occur in all related areas of my professional practice. There were 2 areas in particular where potential for improvement in my practice was indicated:

- support for the collection and analysis of information; and
- encouragement for the development of trust and respect between individuals.



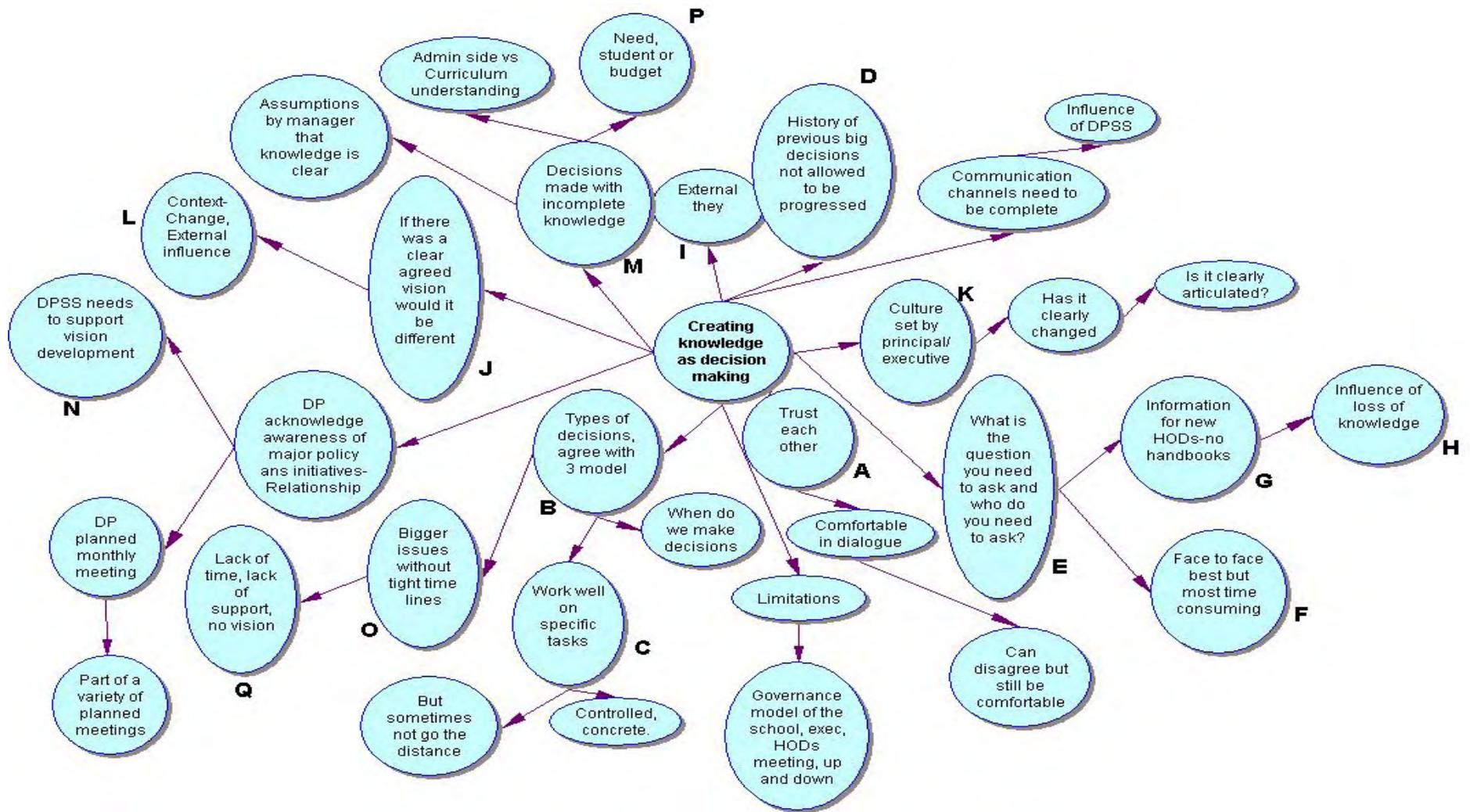
*The two areas were the same areas indicated for improvement in the students at risk group survey. The variation in results could be explained by the fact that I interact differently with individual HODs or that individual HODs have differing expectations of me and my interactions with them.*

The other areas for improvement were:

- make good use of available knowledge;
- openly share important knowledge; and
- involve key people in important decisions.

### 6.3.3 *The concept map*

The concept map was developed during the conversation. The concept map was the only formal record of the themes and issues that I identified during this conversation. The map serves as a point of reference and clarification for the reader and an analysis tool for the researcher. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A). The authenticity of this summarisation is addressed later in this section.



Concept Map 8. Head of Department Conversation, 11 February 2005.

#### 6.3.4 *The conversation*

I have analysed this conversation using the framework questions provided to the group. My interpretation of the conversation has been validated by the group and the answers provided have been edited by the group.

**Question-**What do we do well as a group?

The issue of trust in each other was identified (A). It was agreed that as a group we were comfortable in dialogue with each other. We could disagree with each other about an issue during a meeting but next day still be comfortable with each other.



*The broad statement of trust raises a question whether there are varying levels of trust between different members of the group and I am unsure how the specific levels could be quantified. I am unsure whether this statement of trust includes me as an administrator. The survey responses may provide some clarification on this question.*

**Question-**What types of decisions do we make? How effective are we as a group of decision makers?

The group was comfortable with a model that I presented which identified 3 types of decisions (B). Artefact 21 outlines the decision making model presented to the group. They suggested that the executive decision (I decide) developed from information gathering and the consensus decision (democratic) was reached after stakeholder dialogue.

In clarifying the group's effectiveness as decision makers we identified that we worked well on specific tasks that were controlled and concrete (C). However when it came to bigger decisions without tight time lines we sometimes didn't go the distance. The inability to secure closure on complex decisions has been compounded by a history within the organisation where previous significant organisational decisions were either not allowed or not able to be progressed (D).

**Artefact 21. Critical Friend Conversation (09/08/2004, p.4).**

There are three types or areas of decision making:

1. Democratic type, we share and we democratically decide.
2. Collect information from a variety of sources and then I decide.
3. I decide.

**Question-**How do we gather knowledge to support our decision making/influencing?

The group agreed with the view expressed by one HOD that in developing knowledge it is important to know what question you need to ask, who you need to ask and who needs to ask it. It was felt that within this organisation conversation can be the most effective way to construct knowledge from the information collected. It was acknowledged that while conversation can occur in a variety of ways including, informal gatherings, formal meetings, phone calls and e-mails, the conversations employing face to face communication were normally the best method of sharing/gathering information and creating knowledge (F).

One HOD shared a story related to the challenges of being a new manager in the organisation and that as a new manager there was no handbook outlining many of the important organisational processes and procedures (G). For many situations new HODs have to create their own knowledge about specific scenarios resulting in the development of many variations of specific processes and an inefficient use of the manager's time.

Once again the relationship between information and knowledge was discussed. There was agreement that we gather information and from this information we construct our individual knowledge. It was felt that when we share our individual knowledge it is transformed into information which can then be reconstructed.



*While knowledge creation is predominantly supported by dialogue the importance of the collection of information should not be overlooked. A collation of information in handbooks could save new managers the time spent in dialogue with others as information is gathered. It could also prevent the creation of hybrid practices within*

*the organisation. As an administrator I should not just focus on the more complex approaches to creating knowledge but I should also be aware on my role in its more simplistic iterations.*

Similarly there were challenges in managing the knowledge developed by long serving staff members, as evidenced by the impact of the extended leave of a manager. Some of the specific tasks undertaken by this manager were unknown by other organisational members (H). Non completion of such tasks only became apparent when there was a negative impact elsewhere in the organisation which had resulted from the non-completion of that task.

During the conversation the concept that an external 'they' had a responsibility in the decision making process and that 'they' had some culpability for the current concerns about decision making and information sharing was identified (I). An external 'they' was referred to on a number of occasions. However when I questioned the group over who constituted the collective 'they' no clear definition could be provided but it was clearly identified that it included executive members. The HODs questioned whether they could legitimately divorce themselves from 'they' or do they constitute part of the collective 'they'? What would be the impact if the HODs accepted their inclusion in the external 'they'?

**Question-**How could we improve our decision making/influencing?

One impediment to our decision making was seen as the lack of a clearly articulated vision for the organisation (J). It was agreed that a three year strategic plan existed and that nearly all members of the group had been involved in the development of that plan. It was also agreed that the strategic plan was revisited annually and that HODs annually developed their individual departmental action plans from the organisation's strategic plans. However the view was endorsed that there was a shaky alignment between the strategic plan and the reality of our strategic decision making. Factors that were suggested as contributing to the poor alignment were the externally driven influence of the ongoing policy review and the internal influences linked to a relatively new principal. The new principal brought with him a different leadership approach which was influencing both the organisational culture and the

governance model for the organisation (K). HODs expressed the opinion that while the deputy principals may clearly understand the changes in the governance model of the school, the principal had never provided a formal explanation of the changes and the subsequent impacts on their management responsibilities. HODs suggested that if there was a better understanding of the changed operational context there would be a better basis to support decision making (L).

Similarly when discussing the decision making process supporting the implementation of a new policy there was agreement that if we understood the need behind the policy, for example, student centred or budget centred, it would be easier to understand the decision (M). Better understanding would minimise incorrect assumptions being made by HODs when they were implementing the policy.



*Context and need as identified by Snowden (2002b) were again apparent as influencing factors related to knowledge creation activities.*

**Question-**How can I as deputy principal support group decision making processes?

The group did not provide specific answers to this question. However by drawing upon issues identified by HODs during the conversation I developed a number of relevant support strategies. (N) HODs agreed that I could support decision making by:

- having an active role in the development of the governance model of the school;
- having an active role in developing and maintaining communication channels within the school;
- influencing the culture of the school;
- supporting the development and continued articulation of a clear vision for the school;
- constantly challenging the assumption that specific knowledge is clear;
- regularly acknowledging my awareness of major initiatives within each department; and

- involving myself in decisions about the allocation of resources that would support managers to overcome time shortages.



*The statements are personal challenges linked to my responsibilities when working with the HODs in decision making activities. They can be used as points of reflection related to my professional practice.*

The conversation had not addressed all the questions identified in the framework. Some members of the group requested that the group reconvene to consider the unanswered question of ‘what could be indicators of effective decision making or knowledge creation?’ It was agreed to continue the conversation at a future time. Five members of the original group returned to continue the conversation on 18 February 2005.

**Question-**What could be indicators of effective decision making or knowledge creation?

The group struggled with the challenge of identifying indicators. They were more comfortable engaging in stories outlining examples of our bad decision making and causes of this behaviour. These stories were largely a replay of the previous week’s conversation and served as a validation of the relevant concept map (executive conversation, 11/02/2005) and a further development of those questions addressed in the initial HOD conversation.



*Individual HODs appear to be most comfortable in recounting a story of something that has happened rather than critically reflecting on the ‘why’ it has happened. The use of stories may more easily depersonalise an individual’s involvement in the scenario being explored. Stories may also be a natural way for us to surface tacit knowledge as in the SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka &Takeuchi, 1995).*

An outcome of the conversation was the identification of a number of indicators of effective decision making. The following list of indicators was developed by the HODs.

- The individuals within the group have a sense that there is some control over the decision making process and outcome, resulting in a sense of collective ownership of the decision.
- The group believes that there is full information available to make the specific decision.
- The decision is well documented and available for revisiting.
- There are minimal unseen ramifications of the decision. Where there are ramifications individuals and the group can handle any ramifications that evolve.
- The decision has a lasting workability and can stand the test of time.
- A strategy exists to facilitate the implementation of the decision.
- There is an evaluation process built into the implementation strategy.

As a practical outcome of the discussion group members requested that this summary was provided to them. As an indication of the summary's value one member indicated that she would place the list in the front of her work diary to allow her to periodically revisit these indicators.

One other area that the group focused upon during the conversation was our identified ineffectiveness at making more complex decisions which they labelled as strategic decisions (O). The group actually questioned when they had last made a strategic decision. Some examples were provided but the general consensus was that there were more examples of uncompleted strategic decisions than completed.

Our success in making concrete operational decisions was explored. It was agreed that where success had occurred in this area of decision making it was where decisions were linked to contexts that we knew well, either as individuals or as groups. The experience that has come from our time in our individual positions has helped to build our comfort in specific contexts. We tend to make what one HOD identified as 'just in time decisions'.

The group elaborated upon what was required to make better decisions related to strategic and complex issues. They suggested that at the start of the decision making

process we need to have clarified the context in which the decision is being made. When I pressed for clarification of context examples suggested included organisational environment and direction. There also needed to be a clear identification and understanding of the parameters controlling the decision. One important parameter provided as an example within the organisation was whose 'need' was to be given primary consideration when making the decision (P). For example should the needs of students or teachers come first? Stories shared in the conversation provided examples of where the needs of teachers had been the primary need when previous decisions had been made in the organisation. Such decisions had been made to the detriment of students.



*The executive conversation (2/11/2004, p.3) had identified that powerful influences on decisions made by organisational members were the needs of organisational members. Responding to these needs could be at the detriment of other stakeholders. In that conversation it was argued that knowledge in the school hadn't been developed in response to the needs of external clients, customers, students and families but rather the needs of the decision making group. When making decisions it is vital that the need priority is clearly understood, for example, student driven or budget driven: student driven or teacher driven.*

To make complex decisions there also needs to be a clear identification of the potential implications of individual decisions. As an extension of the identification of implications a review and evaluation process should be built into the implementation plan.

Another important requirement is time (Q). Time influences the effectiveness of all stages of decision making or knowledge creation. Time impacts on the quality of information collection, group discussion and planning. Usually the availability of time for HODs to use in such processes was limited. HODs identified that suitable Information Technology resources can optimise the use of the time that is available.



*As an administrator I must advocate for the allocation of resources to support the decision making process in particular time. Resources that help to create more time so that ultimately HODs and myself could be more actively involved in knowledge*

*creation activities could be in the form of human resources or physical resources such as information and communication technologies that support information sharing.*

Also identified was the vital importance of persuading others to support the decision. The influencing role of the decision making group was discussed. It was acknowledge that for individual HODs to effectively persuade and influence others outside the group individual HODs needed to own the decision. There also needed to be a clear and common understanding of the decision and not several individual and different interpretations of the decision. Several stories were provided to illustrate where differing interpretations of decisions were provided by individuals within the group to other organisational members, which subsequently had negative organisational results.

Time or more so a lack of time, was an area of great sensitivity for the HODs. They expressed a common view that they had more and more work to complete with less and less time to allocate to the completion of individual tasks. Many personal narratives were provided as examples of the impact of time shortages. One HOD indicated that they had not been trained as a manager and would welcome a better understanding of the theory of management. In response to this statement I spoke briefly about two contrasting theoretical views of management. Firstly, the more commonly accepted modernist view of management as a clean, precise and controlled process. Secondly I presented the alternative view that management can be an imprecise, turbulent and sometimes chaotic process sometimes metaphorically described as managing in a whirlpool. The HODs could identify with the whirlpool environment. I suggested that an acceptance of the complexity of management and its naturally chaotic nature made day to day personal survival easier.



*The conversation did not specifically acknowledge ways in which I as an administrator could support more effective decision making/knowledge creation by the group. However drawing upon the factors that influence decision making and the indicators of good decision making I can apply these to my practice as an administrator.*

### 6.3.5 Authentication

Authentication of my analysis of the Heads of Department (HODs) conversation occurred on the 24 May, 2005. Five of the original participants attending the authentication conversation and two members provided their apologies. In keeping with my original agreement with the HODs, no tape recording was made of this conversation and only a record of meeting was kept.

To facilitate authentication the participants in the original conversation were provided, prior to the meeting, with photocopies of my analysis including the conversation concept maps. All HODs, signed their copies of my analysis as an indication of their verification of my analysis. The two HODs who could not participate in the conversation individually provided me with feedback and their signed copies of my analysis. HODs indicated that my analysis was an interesting read with sections of it timely for the group to revisit. I have identified a number of issues raised and comments made by HODs.

One HOD e-mailed me to suggest that maybe we feel the need to tell war stories to show we have been wounded in action and to validate our experience or is this need for validation a reaction against secret fears of incompetence. However, during the authentication process there was no response by other HODs to this assertion by their peer.

A number of HODs were surprised by the high level of my personal angst described within the analysis and indicated that they had been not been conscious of this angst or intended to upset me. I clarified that the angst was primarily mine and directed at the assumption I made that a research conversation and a work conversation could be embedded into one conversation.



*Upon reflection this level of angst could have been associated with the whole research project if I had not shifted the focus away from the broader organisation to a self-examination of my professional practice. The focus of the original scenario group conversation may have caused this conversation to stray from ‘me’ to ‘we’, because as a manager working with other managers I have found it difficult to make*

*this differentiation. The original decision within my critical friend conversations appears to have been well considered.*

The issue of the collective ‘they’ was identified as being very significant with our role as managers. It was suggested that if we more openly accepted that we were part of ‘they’ our responses and actions may be very different. The challenge as part of a management group may be to move from a positioning of the isolating ‘they’ to a positioning of the embracing ‘we’. Such a movement may encourage us as a group to make decisions, take action, accept responsibility and not deflect responsibility to the nameless and faceless ‘they’.

Also identified as significant was the observation that HODs were more comfortable making decisions within the context of their departments rather than a whole school decision.



*The challenge for me as an administrator with leadership responsibility for the HOD group is how to increase their capacity and willingness to move out of their curriculum enhanced comfort zone. Is giving managers the capacity to sustain and operate outside their comfort zone an example of what knowledge creation in a management context is really about?*

### 6.3.6 Summary of issues for further consideration

Concept map 8 provides an overview of the key issues identified in the conversation. The following points are presented as a summary of my reflections on the key issues identified in the analysis of this conversation.

- There are significant tensions associated with being an insider researcher. The duality of both administrator and researcher requires care and sensitivity to these possible tensions.
- A major focus of the conversation had been decision making within the middle management level of the school.
- I started to look at my personal resilience from another perspective. Rather than adopt a worldview where I must be seen to be strong no matter what the challenge, an alternative worldview could be built around how I can better

nurture my resilience and manage my personal sensitivity and response to challenge.

- As an administrator I should not just focus on the more complex approaches to creating knowledge but I should also be aware on my role in its more simplistic iterations. The importance of the collection and distribution of mundane information should not be overlooked.
- Individuals may be more comfortable in recounting a story of something that has happened rather than critically reflecting on the ‘why’ it has happened. The use of stories may more easily depersonalise an individual’s involvement in the scenario being explored. Stories may also be a natural way for us to surface tacit knowledge as in the SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka &Takeuchi, 1995).
- When making decisions it is vital that the need priority is clearly understood by those involved in the process, for example, student driven or budget driven: student driven or teacher driven.
- Is giving managers the capacity to sustain and operate outside their comfort zone an example of what knowledge creation in a management context is really about?

## 6.4 UNION REPRESENTATIVE CONVERSATION

It is important to understand why in an organisation of over 220 employees I approached only one person for an individual conversation. The answer to this question lies in the history of this person within the school.

### 6.4.1 Background

In his position as a union representative (UR) within the school UR has been involved in a number of differences of opinion on industrial matters with members of the administration team, his employing authority and at times, other staff members. On numerous occasions within the history of the school his interpretation of events, proposals and policy has been significantly different to the interpretation formed by others. His history of above average success in achieving moderation of undesirable bureaucratic actions and a very long history of assistance with change at the workplace have positioned him as the union representative that teachers approach when aggrieved by decisions made inside and outside the organisation and with concerns that they have been ignored.

From a personal perspective I can reflect on several examples where I have spent considerable time in dialogue with UR trying to justify a decision that I had reached and negotiate the implementation of a related organisational change. In short, UR had demonstrated significant levels of influence within the organisation and in doing so had generated considerable support for his position, conflict around him and antagonism toward him. UR has an informal leadership role within the organisation. Artefact 22 provides evidence to acknowledge UR's leadership role.

#### **Artefact 22. Executive conversation (2/11/2004, p.6).**

Paul D:	Let's be blunt, I suppose UR is a leader.
Member:	Yep.
Member:	Yeah.
Paul D:	And he's a leader on agendas that perhaps aren't the agendas that we want.
Member:	That's right.

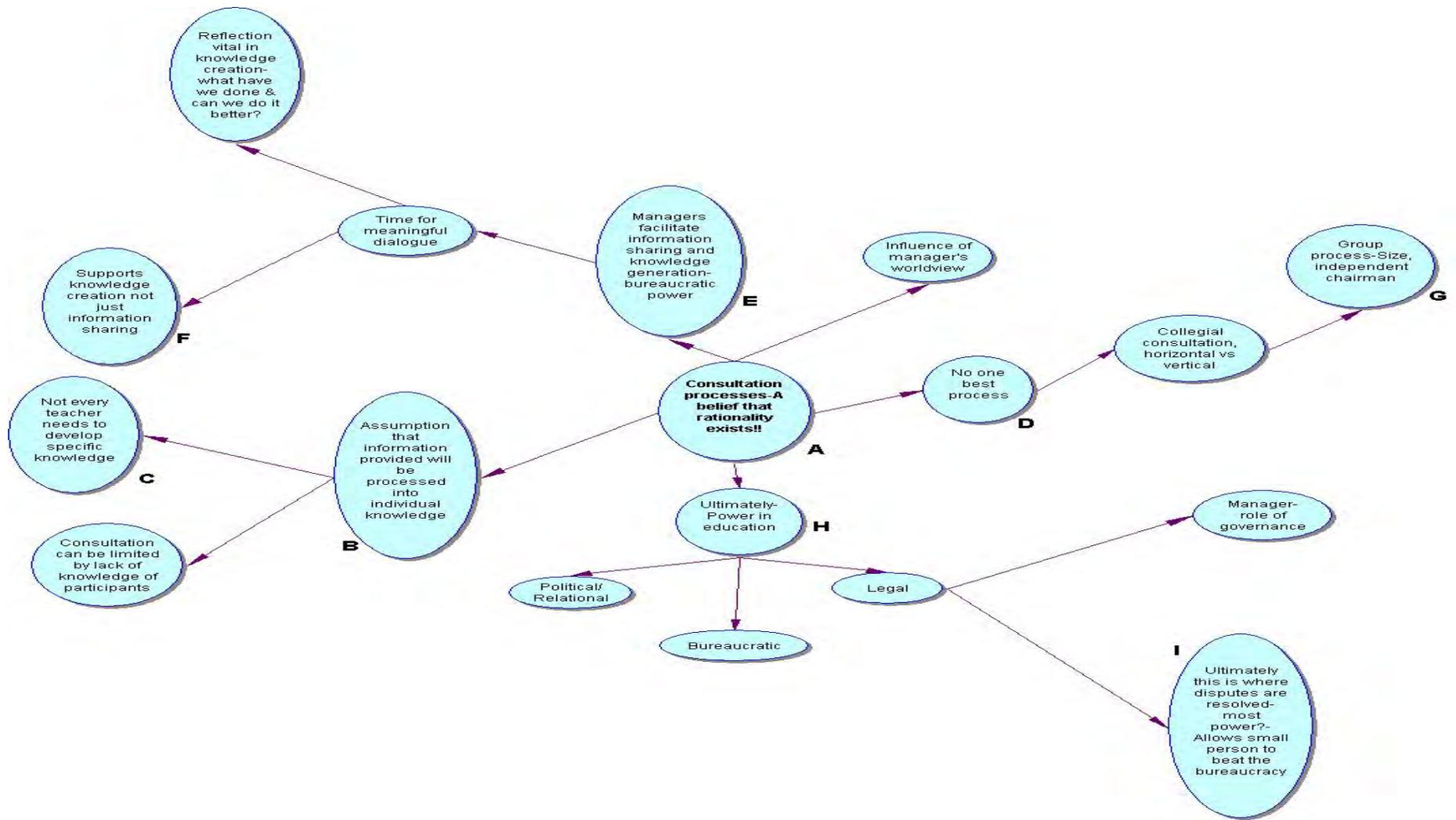
It was the level of influence within the organisation, through official roles in his union capacity, and unofficial roles in his capacity to influence opinion, that suggested he might possess a unique perspective on the creation and use of knowledge within the school and my role as an administrator in the process.

While I had always considered that there might be value for my research in having a conversation with UR, the catalyst for our research conversation was a tense staff meeting which I had chaired. During this meeting UR had strongly challenged the communication processes that existed within the organisation. He was particularly critical of the communication flows which supported decision making within the organisation. He indicated that the sharing of information by some parts of the school was very poor and this unwillingness to share was a direct result of individuals within the organisation not wanting to give away power. There was an inference that members of executive were displaying this power holding behaviour. In light of my perceptions of my information sharing behaviours I found his statements personally confronting. I initiated the conversation with UR in the hope of developing a better understanding of his views on knowledge creation and decision making within the school.



*Is some of the tension that UR creates in me caused by him creating challenges to some of my strongly held but not deeply questioned worldviews? Does UR force me as an administrator to reflect on my worldviews? Is the tension he creates in the organisation partly explained by challenges to the worldviews of other organisational members? Are other individuals aware of their worldviews?*

This scenario conversation developed from one introductory question (UR, 26/08/2004, p.1), ‘earlier today you were talking about lateral communication and people in the school not wanting to give away power. Would you like to elaborate on these issues?’ A consequence of this question was that the conversation structure was different to the other scenario conversations, in that the survey was not used as a framework for the conversation. The survey was supplied to UR but he chose not to return a completed survey. The transcript of this conversation is available from the author upon request.



Concept Map 9. Union representative Conversation, 26 August 2004.

#### 6.4.2 *The concept map*

A summary of the key issues identified in the conversation are indicated in the concept map. The concept map was developed after the conversation. After the suggested changes the concept map was validated by UR on 1 June 2005. The linkages between the concept map and the written analysis are demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A). The authenticity of this summarisation is addressed later in this section.

#### 6.4.3 *The conversation*

The conversation developed from one question previously indicated and was constructed around consultation processes within the school (A). The conversation surfaced stories related to several recent events within the school where there had been a strong need for effective consultation processes. The stories provided a range of perspectives on consultation, with UR being highly supportive of the very structured consultation process that had been employed by the school in one recent situation. UR (26/08/2004, p.10) presented his personal view, ‘...my concern is more the quality of the consultation and the quality of the feedback. I believe in the quality of the decision for the organisation. You don’t get quality feedback if you don’t have an informed population.’

Administrators often assume that information provided to teachers has been processed into individual knowledge (UR, 26/08/2004, p.2) (B). However a factor limiting effective consultative processes can be the lack of knowledge of participants (UR, 26/08/2004, p.1). It is important to clarify that in some situations not every teacher needs to develop specific knowledge (UR, 26/08/2004, p.2) (C). UR (26/08/2004, p.1) indicated that there was no one best approach to consultation and that it was appropriate to select the best communication mechanism for the situation (D).



*How an individual administrator shares information will be strongly influenced by their individual worldviews on decision making in the organisation. The assumption that information only has to be provided for individuals to subsequently construct*

*knowledge should be challenged by administrators. As an administrator I should consider employing a range of strategies to increase the likelihood that information provided to teachers will be constructed into personal knowledge that can then be used to support decision making.*

Administrators demonstrate the use of bureaucratic power when they determine how information sharing and knowledge creation occurs within their organisation (E). If knowledge creation is important to an administrator they will explicitly demonstrate this belief by providing time and facilitation processes to support meaningful dialogue and reflection (UR, 26/08/2004, p.3). Knowledge management processes would support knowledge creation as well as information sharing (F). Processes may need to address many issues including, group size, group protocols and the role of the facilitator (UR, 26/08/2004, p.6) (G).

Two key questions that underpin knowledge creation could be:

- What have we done; and
- Can we do it better?

In his exploration of power UR (26/08/2004, p.8) argued that 3 essential types of power exist in education; legal power, political or relational power and bureaucratic power (H). Central to UR's worldviews on dispute resolution was the belief that ultimately legal power resolved disputes and allowed the little person to win against the bureaucracy (I). Artefact 23 makes explicit UR's power construct.

**Artefact 23. Union representative conversation (26/08/2004, p.9).**

In purely administrative matters bureaucratic power rules. If I am being given a directive by Paul Dillon and it is clearly within his authority and I am his subordinate I have no choice but to say 'yes, sir' and do it. That is the way that it works.

Political power is in a sense, I suppose, where there is elements of discretion in the administrative power. The Principal has discretion over this and I go up and I talk to the Principal and I say that I would like you to exercise your discretion in a particular way. And this is may be where corruption starts? I don't know. But that is where you get all sorts of political things going on. You bend the rules a little bit to accommodate the realities because even rules are imperfect. You don't have perfect rules.

Then we get legal power. Now both political power and bureaucratic power are subject to the law. The law gives the bureaucrats their power. The political power is constrained to a certain extent by the law because the law recognizes that the power that it has given in many cases contains elements of discretion and delegation and so on.

... So what you have, is that although we operate according to the rule of law, if your population doesn't know the law, the law of authority tends to take over.



*Critical friend discussions (critical friend 2, 09/08/2004, p.4) have previously identified that there are three types of decision making processes.*

- 1. Democratic type, we share and we democratically decide.*
- 2. Collect information from a variety of sources and then I decide.*
- 3. I decide.*

*UR has conceptualised dispute resolution, which is a type of decision making within a context of power. Each power type in education (UR, 26/08/2004, p.10) could have a direct relationship with one of the decision making types identified in the critical friend model. I would suggest that links exist between:*

- political power and democratic decision making;*
- bureaucratic power and executive decision making; and*
- legal power and I decide.*

*The influence of legal power and the making of decisions through an industrial consultation/disputation model bear further consideration. If legal power is the ultimate determiner of decisions within the school should an aspiring administrator have a solid grounding in educational law before being promoted into an administrative position? Or is the reliance on legal power more a reflection of the an individual's worldviews and associated filters through which they view decision making, particularly decision making under challenging conditions.*

#### *6.4.4 Authentication*

Authentication of my analysis of the UR conversation occurred on 1 June, 2005. I made no attempt to record this conversation and I indicated to the UR that if there were significant issues which he wished to discuss these should be identified in our

next scenario conversation which would be taped and transcribed. Minutes of the authentication meeting were maintained. To facilitate authentication the UR was provided with a photocopy of my analysis prior to this conversation and access to the conversation transcripts during the conversation. To indicate his verification of the authenticity of my analysis I asked UR to sign his copy.

UR expressed concern over my 'monodimensional' representation of him. He indicated that he had a greater role in the school than just being a Union Representative. He highlighted that in the 14 years that he had been employed at the school he had only been union representative for 8 years. He outlined that in his time at the school he had been a member of a diversity of groups involved in change and innovation in the school with examples including the social committee, the school newsletter, the refurbishment committee and the enrolment review committee.

He did not see himself as much as standing up against administration but more as informing people of their rights and providing information to support individuals in creating knowledge to support their action. He will provide information to the best of his knowledge or refer people to where to look for information. He reinforced that decisions ultimately should be made based on the rule of law rather than the increasing practice of disparate groups negotiating deals as increasingly evidenced by the employing authority and the Union executive.

Upon reflection I indicated to the UR that my knowledge and subsequent description of him were influenced by the context, my needs and our relationship. From a context perspective I had only worked with the UR for 5 years and our normal dialogue was linked to industrial issues. From a need perspective I had to explain to an academic audience why out of the 220 staff at the school his was the only individual conversation. And from a relationship perspective as an administrator I had to frequently address industrial issues advanced by the UR.

Another significant issue in the authentication process was that stories formed the basis of much of the URs discussion. There were stories related to his time in Canada, the changes to the school newsletter and about the refurbishment of the building. It was through stories that UR outlined how his influence with and

acceptance by a significant proportion of the staff had evolved. His influence within the school was based upon him getting 'runs on the board'.

On 10 June 2005 UR provided me with his signed copy of my analysis of our conversation. On reviewing his written notes I became aware of some specific concerns that he had identified in my analysis and the concept map. UR particularly identified necessary changes to my background description. His notes indicated that 'this with changes reasonably reflects my worldview on how things are. Equally or more important in my view is the way things should be. It is my view that the more horizontal and informed consultations are, the better decisions are made and less disputation there is. I think that what is here suggests 'negativism' towards the current systems with no thoughts on how it can (should) be improved'.

In response to this feedback I made a number of changes to my background description of the UR as he had indicated on his copy of the analysis. I provided UR with copies of the new versions.

*With the agreement of UR I have kept my original background description as research data providing evidence of how my power position within the organisation influenced how I viewed relationships and issues within the organisation.*

#### *6.4.5 Summary of issues for further consideration*

Concept map 9 provides an overview of the key issues identified in the conversation. The following points are presented as a summary of my reflections on the key issues identified in the analysis of this conversation.

- Is some of the tension that UR creates in me caused by him creating challenges to some of my strongly held but not deeply questioned worldviews? Is the tension he creates in the organisation partly explained by challenges to the worldviews of other organisational members? Are other individuals aware of their worldviews?
- How an individual administrator shares information will be strongly influenced by their individual worldviews on decision making in the organisation.

- Administrators should challenge the assumption that information only has to be provided for individuals to subsequently construct knowledge.
- A relationship can be conceptualised between conceptualisations of power and decision making types identified in the critical friend model. The relationships are:
  1. political power and democratic decision making;
  2. bureaucratic power and executive decision making; and
  3. legal power and I decide.
- As an administrator my worldviews influence my perceptions and actions related to activities within the organisation. A telling comment made by UR was that everything depends on where you sit (UR, 26/08/2004, p.10).

## 6.5 SIGNIFICANT THEMES

By the completion of this round of scenario group conversations I had reflected upon a number of issues related to my practice. I have identified many of these issues in the italics throughout the chapter and the use of an appropriate icon in the page margin. At the end of each analysis section I had identified key issues for further consideration. Common issues also included in the critical friend conversations were: power, trust, managerial style and the influence of humanity or common good. Other issues that were identified in the literature and subsequently discussed in these conversations included: clarification of the differences between information and knowledge, the construction of knowledge, the filtering influence of individual worldviews, and the context and need of the group.

A summary of the significant issues identified in the conversations are listed again for the convenience of the reader.

- The relationship between information and knowledge is a reflection of the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) with its focus on the movement of knowledge between tacit and explicit states through the processes of socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. Conversation is central to this process of knowledge creation.

- The framework of context, needs and relationship appears to provide a suitable framework for the analysis of the executive scenario group conversation. It provides evidence related to the professional practice of an administrator when viewed through the lens of a contemporary knowledge management discourse.
- Knowledge management and creation do not occur in a context free environment. Knowledge management is situated as a component of the leadership role of an educational administrator (executive conversation, 02/11/2004, p.1).
- The existence of a need provides the motivation to collect data, generate information and subsequently create knowledge. When making decisions it is vital that the need priority is clearly understood by those involved in the process, for example, student driven or budget driven: student driven or teacher driven.
- The significance of dialogue, relationship and trust were identified. Administrators are confronted by the challenge that, as they seek to build trust with school staff, they have to constantly overcome the cynicism and suspicion associated with their position of formal leadership.
- An administrator could be accused of faddism if they uncritically adopted the key messages from a management discourse into their professional practice.
- Administrators make risky assumptions about the level of shared understanding that exists when they facilitate knowledge creation consultations. Administrators need to be conscious of professional checks that can be made on the levels of understanding that exist.
- There are significant tensions associated with being an insider researcher. The duality of both administrator and researcher requires care and sensitivity to these possible tensions.
- I started to look at my personal resilience from another perspective. Rather than adopt a worldview where I must be seen to be strong no matter what the challenge, an alternative worldview could be built around how I can better nurture my resilience and manage my personal sensitivity and response to challenge.

- As an administrator I should not just focus on the more complex approaches to creating knowledge but I should also be aware on my role in its more simplistic iterations. The importance of the collection and distribution of mundane information should not be overlooked.
- Individuals may be more comfortable in recounting a story of something that has happened rather than critically reflecting on the ‘why’ it has happened. The use of stories may more easily depersonalise an individual’s involvement in the scenario being explored. Stories may also be a natural way for us to surface tacit knowledge as in the SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka &Takeuchi, 1995).
- Tension and conflict can arise through challenges to some of my strongly held but not deeply questioned worldviews. An individual may create tension in the organisation through challenging the worldviews of other organisational members. When challenging another person’s reality or worldview, administrators must be sure that they are prepared to challenge their own worldviews and/or to have them challenged by others.
- As an administrator my worldviews influence my perceptions and actions related to activities within the organisation (UR, 26/08/2004, p.10). How an individual administrator shares information will be strongly influenced by their individual worldviews on decision making in the organisation.
- Administrators should challenge the assumption that information only has to be provided for individuals to subsequently construct knowledge.
- A relationship can be conceptualised between conceptualisations of power and decision making types identified in the critical friend model. The relationships are:
  1. political power and democratic decision making;
  2. bureaucratic power and executive decision making; and
  3. legal power and I decide.

Common themes from the conversations were drawn together to develop a summary model (Figure 4) which diagrammatically represents my analysis of the common learnings from the scenario group conversations. The summary model was an initial attempt to present my professional practice as related to the creation and use of

knowledge. The summary map was used as the starting point of the next cycle of scenario group conversations which I have referred to in the chapter 7 as the summary conversations.

## **7 PHASE 2 - CYCLE 2 SCENARIO GROUP CONVERSATIONS**

### **7.1 BACKGROUND**

The scenario group conversations undertaken in the second cycle of action research explored the summary model that I had developed through my analysis of the first cycle of scenario group conversations. The summary model was developed by identifying common issues from across the concept maps or significant issues from the individual concept maps. The model presented a summary of the general principles of knowledge management within the context of a school.

There were 3 aims of the cycle 2 scenario group conversations.

1. Identify affirming and disaffirming views related to the summary model and refine the model to reflect the views of each scenario group.
2. Generate further discussion on the theoretical issues and my professional practice associated with knowledge creation and management.
3. Obtain feedback from individual scenario members on their perceptions of any changes to my professional practice attributable to my studies.

The cycle 2 conversations were undertaken soon after the cycle 1 authentication process was completed with each of the scenario groups. Three of the cycle 1 scenario groups participated in this cycle of conversations. The Head of Department scenario group members indicated that they did not have the time available to participate in this conversation.

In chapter 3 I provided a detailed background to the methodology employed in the cycle 2 conversations. To refresh the reader's memory a summary of the methodology employed is provided.

- Individual conversations were held with each scenario group.
- The conversations were taped and professionally transcribed.

- The group was provided with paper copies of the summary model and all members were simultaneously able to view the model via a data projector image. The model also served as a stimulus for the conversation.
- My interpretation of the model was provided.
- Identified changes to the model were completed during the conversation.
- The individual scenario group versions of the model were authenticated.
- Individual members were invited to identify changes in my professional practice that could be attributed to my research activities. (Participant feedback is discussed in chapter 8.)

Chapter 7 provides a brief explanation of the summary model as represented in Figure 4 and an analysis of each of the 3 scenario group conversations as related to the summary model. The executive group and the union representative made relatively minor changes to the summary model. Whereas the Student at Risk Scenario Group challenged the model at greater depth which consequently resulted in major changes to the summary model. For this reason I will firstly analyse the executive group and union representative conversations. The Student at Risk Scenario group conversation will then be analysed.

## 7.2 EXPLANATION OF THE SUMMARY MODEL

The summary model was developed from issues that were identified as being significant in the cycle 1 conversations. The significance of each component of the model was identified in the key learning summaries presented at the conclusion of each scenario group section of chapter 6. My assertions of significance have then been tested in the authentication focus of the cycle 2 conversations which is discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

In this section I provide an explanation for the summary model (Figure 4). Moving from the left hand side is leadership as represented in Glover's (2002) Adaptive Leadership model where knowledge management is explicitly positioned as one of four principles of leadership. In identifying leadership I include both formal and informal leadership.

Having positioned managing knowledge as only one part of what a leader does I have then represented the influence that an individual's worldviews of knowledge have on their conceptualisation of the relationship between knowledge creation and knowledge management. An individual's basic values and beliefs about knowledge impact on how they work with it. One person's worldview may see it as working with a knowledge creation process, while another person's worldview may see it as the management of a knowledge object. In creating knowledge and then sharing it with others, individuals either consciously or subconsciously, make choices about making their knowledge explicit. Before personal knowledge is shared as information with others these choices are considered through three filters; context, need and relationships. In sharing information opportunities for the creation of new knowledge are generated. There is a basic assumption underpinning this model that individuals involved in the process behave rationally.

I have indicated in chapters 2 and 3 that my personal worldview is of knowledge as a process and I subsequently embrace the concept of knowledge creation rather than knowledge management. Knowledge is personal and the thought of me as an administrator managing another individual's creation of knowledge is presumptive and indicates a level of coercion on my part.

In the workplace, information is frequently shared in the form of stories. In the model, the squares sitting above and below the model's central framework are examples of behaviour derived from the conversations. As an example, the big need identified in my scenario group conversations was that knowledge was created and used in solving problems and making decisions.

From the right hand side of the model I introduce my influences upon the knowledge creation process. As an administrator I can influence the knowledge created within the school through my behaviour. The boxes particularly highlight examples of how I can allocate resources to support or influence the development of an environment where information can be shared and knowledge created.

I now examine the feedback on the summary model provided by the individual scenario group members. Each group member also had the opportunity to provide their perception of my practice as related to working with knowledge and any influence that my studies may have had on my practice.

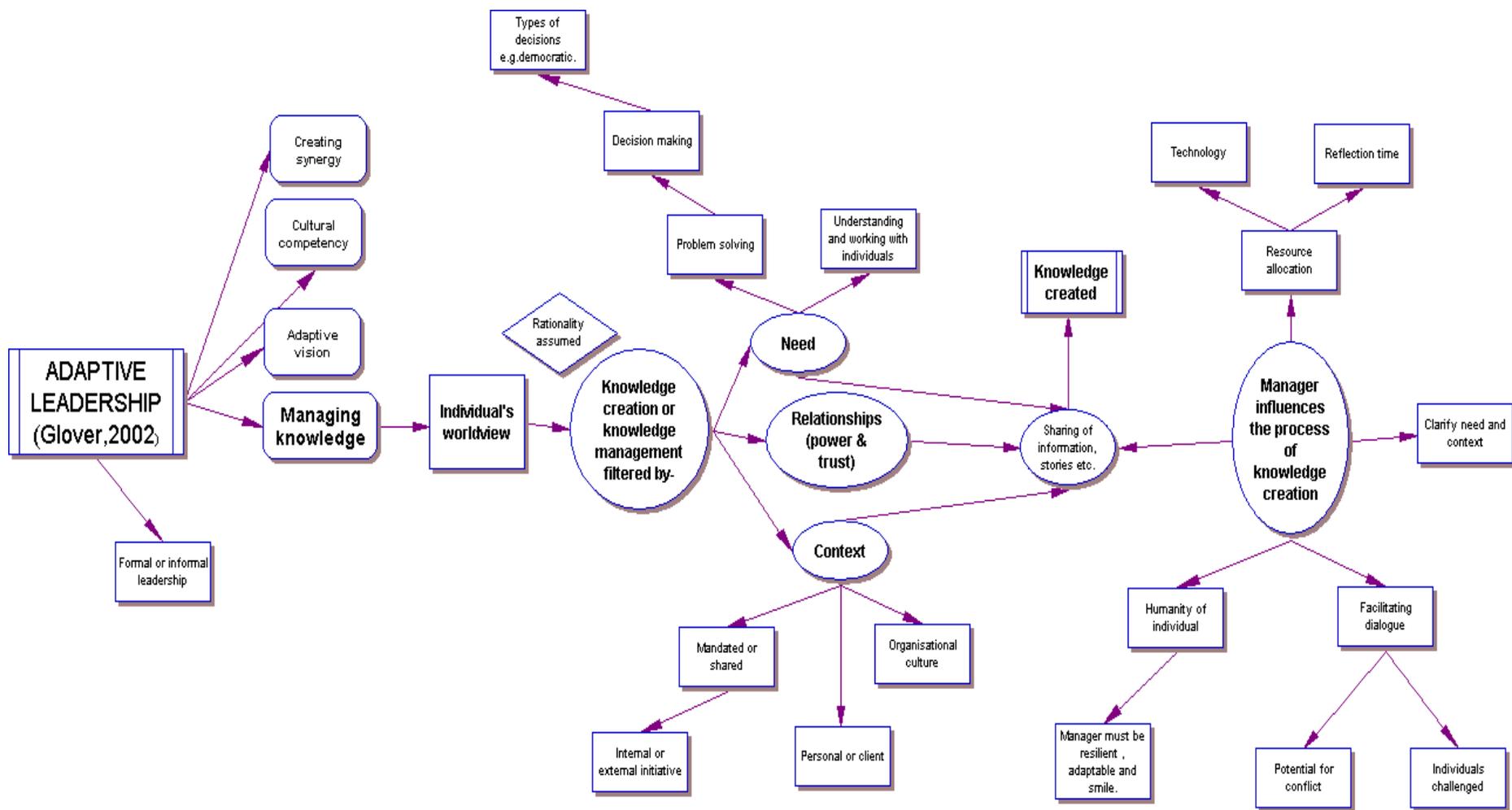


Figure 4. Original summary model.

### 7.3 EXECUTIVE

The executive conversation occurred on 6 June 2005. All members of executive that had participated in the initial scenario group conversation also participated in this conversation. The executive group suggested no fundamental changes to the Summary Model and affirmed the model with the suggestion of minor changes as indicated in Figure 5. The conversation transcript is available upon request from the author. The analysis framework used in this section highlights was:

- re-affirmation of the cycle 1 issues;
- summary model changes; and
- identification of any new issues.

#### 7.3.1 *Re-affirmed*

When considering knowledge creation and management within the context of decision making the reality of whose need was significant. As administrators we focus on a particular set of needs but teachers can have a very different set of needs. A primary need in sharing knowledge and making decisions is personal need as indicated by one executive member (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.2) ‘... it’s all about I. I

find it intriguing that the issue for teaching staff, at least the ones that I have engaged with, is more about I want to stay here, I like it here, I am comfortable here, I think this is a good place for me. I don’t hear them talking about how great it is to engage with technology to overcome the challenge of material or distance.’ The issue of individual need would appear to be a primary consideration in an individual’s creation of knowledge.

Continuing to focus on need, the difference in need can lead to conflict situations for managers (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.2) ‘but I guess my context, or my need, is about finding a solution, and the context is, but at the same time ensure that we are providing quality teaching and learning. Straight away I think that I am in conflict with a culture where most of it is not about teaching and learning it is about hang on how will this effect me and my lifestyle, and how I choose to come here.’



*Snowden (2002b, p.15) would suggest that this is normal 'rational' decision making where the individual will make a choice based on either minimising pain or maximising reward. The challenge for administrators is that it is not possible to fully manage such cause and effect relationships.*

Once again the issue of differentiation between information and knowledge was identified as significant. The question of at what point shared information becomes knowledge was raised. One member questioned 'when you say sharing information, leading to knowledge created, is that really knowledge at that point or does that have to be teased, questioned, processed, before it does become knowledge?' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.6). As indicated by one executive member (06/06/2005, p.2) '..that blur between when there is information, data and knowledge. When people have knowledge, they then take the next step and action from that knowledge, so it is used as a platform to make changes'. The significance of the individual's worldview of knowledge was seen to be reinforced.

It was also acknowledged that administrators assumed that individuals behave rationally when involved in the creation of knowledge. Rational behaviour was important as it influenced the need and the context (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.6).

The importance of need and context as related to knowledge creation and the relationship between these was identified. It was suggested that 'different people would have different concepts of knowledge about different things within this organisation.....Different levels of importance on that knowledge, the hierarchy of knowledge. That they considered to meet their needs in their context would be different from what the manager who is trying to influence that might think' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.6). The issue of whose need was reinforced and the potential for coercion by an administrator was implied.

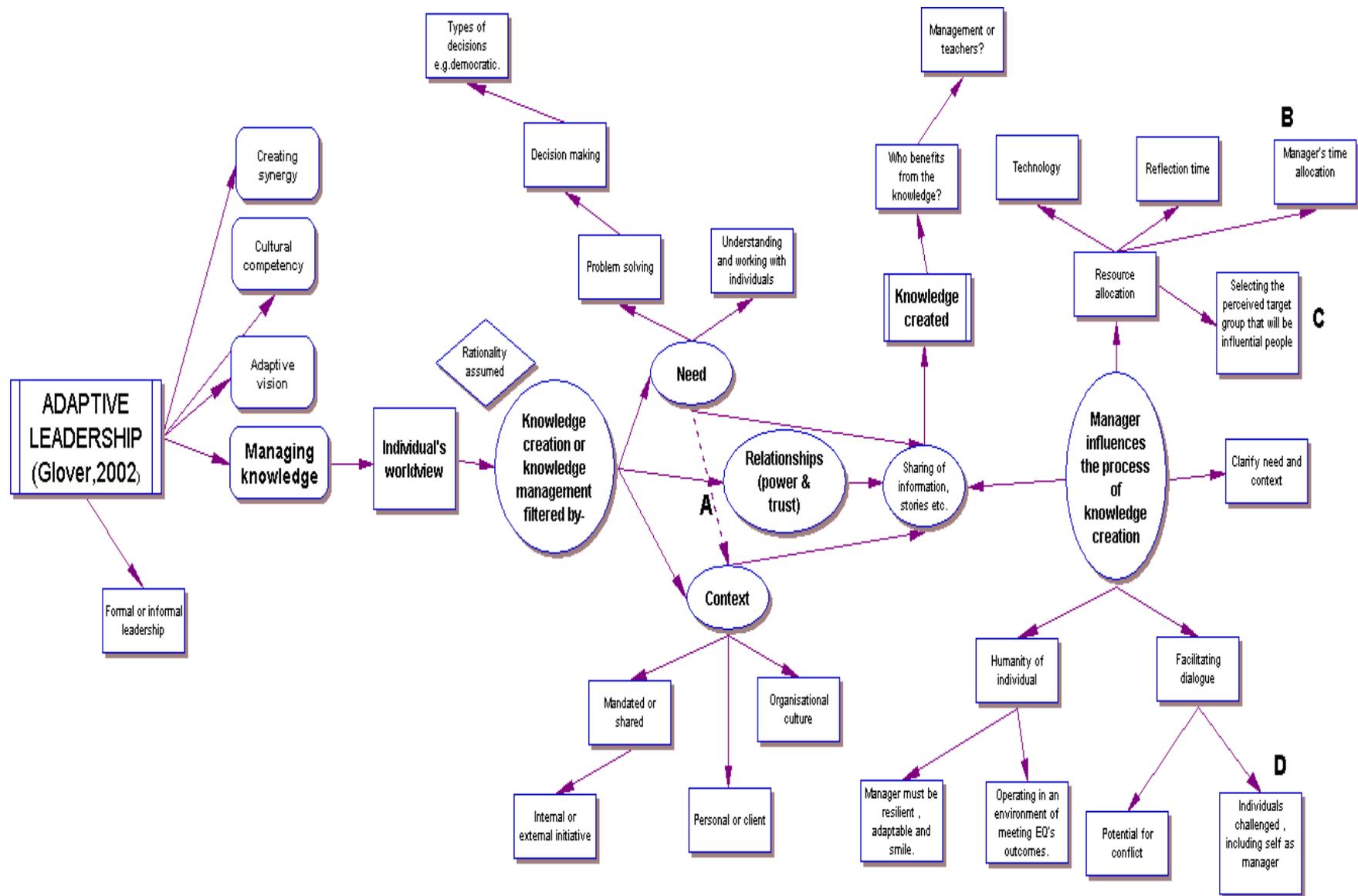


Figure 5. Executive summary model with final amendments 6 June 2005.

In moving to the right hand side of the model and the manager's capacity to influence knowledge creation a number of changes were suggested and items reinforced. In clarifying the influence that managers can have in challenging worldviews through the facilitation of dialogue it was important that challenging applied to both teachers and managers. An executive member indicated that 'knowledge management and knowledge creation is a two way street. We have to be prepared to be challenged on our own world view as well, in that process. Managers should have a defensible and rational view of from where they are coming' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.4).

It was suggested that the team can have a profound influence on the creation of knowledge within the individual team members. This influence can be evidenced when there are individuals who 'sit on a fence, listen, engage to some degree, but perhaps are not changed in any shape or form. Yet what they will do in practice might be different because this is what the team has determined and will be their position or their response' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.7). The statement would appear to support the model in that the influence on the individual of the team could be taken as an example of relationships. This focuses on the issue of what groups/individuals should a manager allocate their time? Is this also about viewing teams and individuals through the relationship filter of a manager's job?

### 7.3.2 *Summary model changes*

Changes to model are identified by shading the relevant box on the model and in the same manner as with the concept maps in chapters 5 and 6, changes are also demonstrated through the use of relevant alphabetic coding on the map and in the narrative, for example (A).

The differentiation between need and context was seen as problematic resulting in a change in the model to reflect the view that 'even though you've got context as a separate thing, it's almost perhaps a bit of a blurring there, maybe there is a direct line, or a dotted line between need and context' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.2) (A).

On the right hand side of the model there were two new issues identified within the manager's influence on resource allocation. These issues required amendments to the model and were the allocation of the manager's time (B) and the specific groups or individuals that the manager engages with and attempts to influence (C). It was suggested that 'if a manager's time is accepted as being a resource, then within the dimension of resource allocation decisions should be made about where we use our time best and most effectively' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.5).

My allocation of resources, including time, can also be influenced by the systemic environment that an administrator has to operate under. The influence was treated as an amendment to the original model by being presented as a circle embracing all of the manager's influences and representing the environment in which the manager operates (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.5). As indicated by one executive member if an action is decreed, if it's directed, if it's a position of the system, then usually as manager our role is to try and positively deliver that action. We feel an obligation to help justify the basis of the need and the context in our own environment (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.5) (D). There is a relationship with the issues identified in the model relating to being resilient, adaptable and smiling.

### *7.3.3 Newly identified*

In questioning the ultimate process of knowledge creation and the sharing of information as depicted in the model it was agreed that knowledge is continuously created within the organisation without the influence of the manager (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.5). The right hand side of the model indicates that management can influence the creation of some of the knowledge created within an organisation. Knowledge can have different qualities and just because it is knowledge doesn't mean it is 100% authentic. Does the right hand side of the model represent ways in which management can influence the creation of better knowledge, or more informed knowledge?

Individual executive members identified a number of considerations that needed to be taken into account when selecting groups or individuals to which to allocate their time (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.4) when attempting to influence a change. When making this resource allocation decision significant considerations were:

- what are the perceived strengths within the target group;
- what people will be influential within the school;
- who will drive with an agenda in a positive vein; and
- how do we respond to those people that are too hard to deal with and don't wish to engage?



*In my eyes the challenge of how to respond to those people who do not wish to engage is a significant issue to be resolved. Artefact 24 is indicative of the question that I need to answer in relation to my own professional practice. Do I employ influencing behaviours as indicated in the summary model and if these do not influence individuals in the manner anticipated do I accept the reality that some people will not wish to engage and ultimately I respect their decision? Or do I adopt more coercive behaviours to achieve the knowledge related outcomes that I desire? Or do I make a decision based on the specific situation and the related context, need and relationship?*

**Artefact 24. Executive conversation (06/06/2005, p.4).**

...what about the ones that don't engage? Do we, I mean I guess we are being selective when we choose just to let them come into the room, sit there on the fence, don't say anything, and then leave the room, we haven't really tried to, and probably because of time constraints, probably because we are not, you know if they are extremely negative, do we say that's just too hard to deal with, easier to work with those that want to talk?



*The statements related to '100% authentic', 'better knowledge' or 'more informed knowledge' would seem to reflect the influence of the manager's need on knowledge creation. It also reflects the challenge of individual's differing ontology with one*

*conceptualisation of a single truth suggested by '100% authentic' and another conceptualisation of multiple realities with 'more informed knowledge'. The decision making need of an administrator could be influenced by their ontology, with an administrator who is accepting of multiple realities being more comfortable in accepting that there may not be just one correct decision in a particular situation.*

An executive member identified the challenge for an administrator who while working with a team is also working with individuals, 'In talking about influencing you're talking about individuals, and you're talking about the role of managers influencing individuals' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.7). Individuals are part of a wider team and can also be members of a range of teams. 'You talk to the HODs and it's different, because they are putting themselves in a different team context too. There is a team of HODs. Then there is the HOD with their team of faculty' (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.8). And ultimately it is a matter of how does each one of those teams interrelate and interconnect. Some administrators believe that through regular scheduled meetings there can be a logical flow of information and sharing of information between teams. Unfortunately that belief takes out the humanity of the situation, and discounts the filters that each person in each of the teams has; their context, their need, their relationship, which impacts on their truth. As we know the message changes (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.8). An administrator who is aware of the influence of the filters should be conscious of their assumptions about knowledge created during individual team processes.

## 7.4 UNION REPRESENTATIVE

The summary model conversation with the union representative (UR) occurred on 10 June 2005. I employed a similar process to that employed with the other scenario groups where I provided an overview of the summary model and invited responses from the participant. The conversation transcript is available upon request from the author. Significantly UR did not suggest many changes to the model summary but rather he spoke around the issues and using stories discussed scenarios in which he had been actively involved. The analysis framework used in this section highlights was:

- re-affirmation of the cycle 1 issues;
- summary model changes; and
- identification of any new issues.

### 7.4.1 *Re-affirmed*

Union representative (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.2) supported the central role of worldviews when he suggested that all we can do in any situation is take a situation and deal with it with what our knowledge and experiences and that we are victims of our own past. Every situation is a result of worldviews and previous experiences impacting on a given situation (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.3).



*Drawing on previous experiences reminded me of Snowden's (2002a, 2002b) ideas on the linkage between mental patterns and knowledge. What is the association with between worldviews and pattern organisers? If we unconsciously construct knowledge on previously stored pattern information are these stored patterns similar or the same as individual worldviews?*

He supported the importance of stories in knowledge creation. Artefact 26 highlights a segment of the conversation that supports the importance and value of stories within the life of an organisation.

**Artefact 25. Union representative conversation (10/06/2005, p.8).**

Paul D:	...Taking that story, and we talked about stories.
UR:	Yeah, stories are good.
Paul D:	Yeah. So by sharing, so it's that sharing of information within the organisation, telling the stories, is how we create our knowledge isn't – in one way?
UR:	Oh yes, it is one way. There's no question about it.
Paul D:	Must be a very efficient way I would suggest.
UR:	Well stories have been around forever. Stories are probably underestimated in some ways to illustrate a point. We all know about great storytellers and that sort of stuff.



*As an administrator I often view staff telling stories as a waste of valuable time. Consequently I do not take the time to look for the messages that often situated, either unknowingly or knowingly, by the speaker within the conversation. Denning (2001) argues that stories are an example of the human side of knowledge management and are vital in facilitating the process. Perhaps I should value stories as being a powerful method of sharing information and an effective catalyst to support the creation of knowledge.*

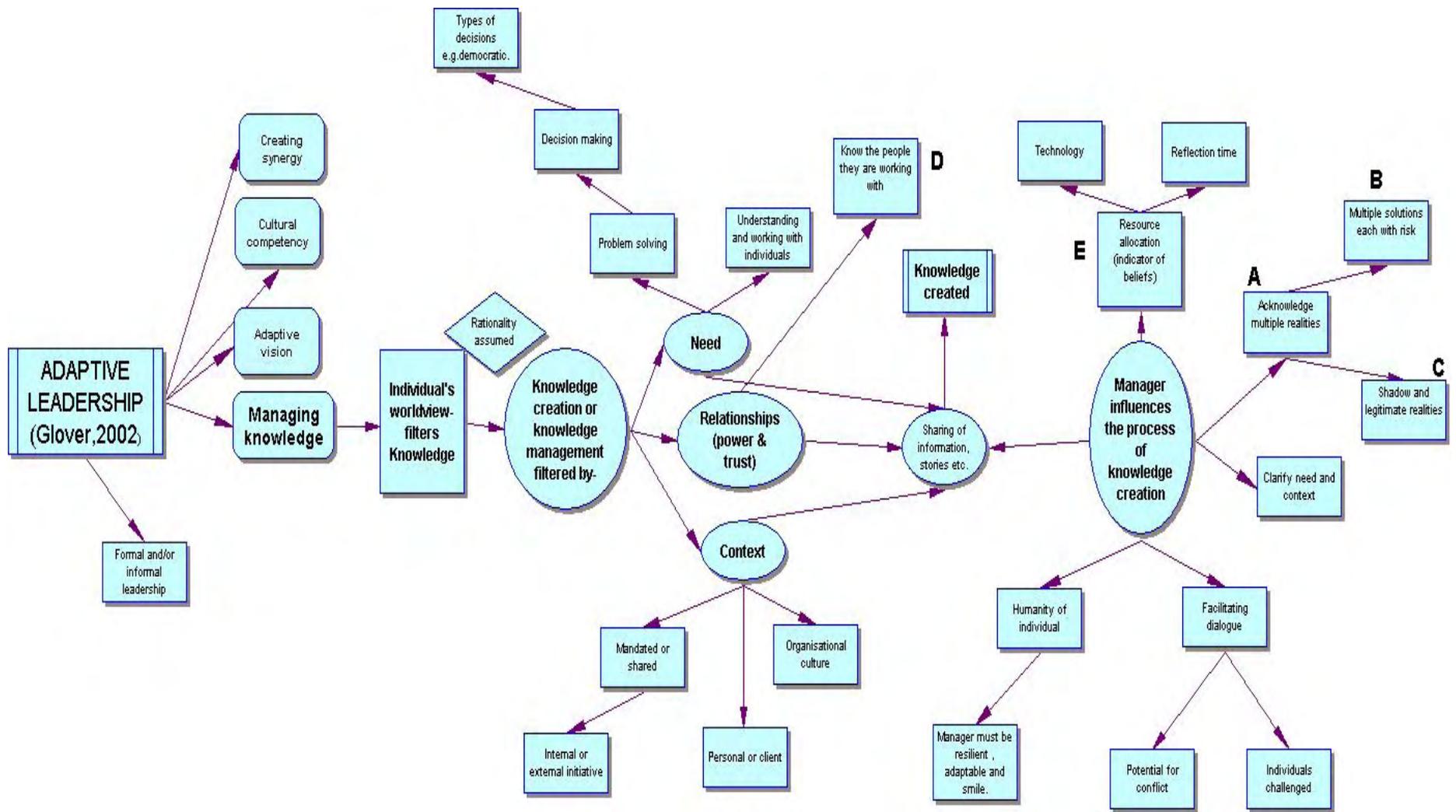


Figure 6. Union representative summary model final amendment 10 June 2005.

#### 7.4.2 *Summary model changes*

UR (10/06/2005, p.3) identified the importance of me as a manager identifying the reality of multiple truths 'if you're going to move towards positive problem solving in management, what you have to do is recognise that all the various points of view are being filtered (A). The manager's job is to make sure that what the group wants to achieve, or he wants to achieve, is not compromised by the reality of people bringing different perceptions and world experiences and so on. And so I suppose it becomes a matter of how does the manager manage reality to achieve a desired end? The first thing he's got to do is recognise the reality himself. If a manager doesn't recognise what's happening around the table he won't solve the problem' (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.3). The statement may have been better worded 'the manager has to recognize the multiple realities around the table.'

UR supported the view that there are often multiple realities associated with various scenarios. He extended this view to suggest that associated with the multiple realities there are also multiple solutions (B). He suggested that it was important for managers to be willing to accept that each solution carries its own risks and rewards and part of the management gain here is what's the risk, what's the reward within particular strategies (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.3). He suggested that every decision has a risk and that a manager should have a variety of exit strategies so that it doesn't appear that they are losing face or political capital (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.4).

UR identified a number of stories related to official and unofficial organisations, 'I think in a lot of ways many organisations get like this. I think Education Queensland is like that. I think this school like's this. I think the union's like this. There's an official organisation and an unofficial one (C). The unofficial one is what the people make up to overcome the problems with the official system. (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.10). The end result is that 'if people see something as too draconian, too unfair, there will be ways around it' (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.11). Similarly he indicated that the more rules you've got the more anti-rules you've got.

So the more you try to regulate people the more ways that people will try to find to be not regulated (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.11).

UR linked risk and trust. He identified that trust can be related to a trust in the individual and also a trust that risk can be contained (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.4). When questioned on how issues associated with, risk, power, trust and relationships could be translated into this organisation, UR suggested 'you have to know your work force' (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.4). (D)

In looking at the capacity of the manager to influence the creation of knowledge within the organisation through the allocation of resources UR (10/06/2005, p.9) identified that resources were important and they also reflected management's belief in the value of the initiative (E). Normally change requires something of the people who are changing their practices. When managers make adequate resources available to support the implementation of the change this provides the opportunities for professional development but it also identifies that administration 'believe this is a great thing if they are willing to throw some money at it' (UR conversation, 10/06/2005, p.9).



*Previous scenario conversations with executive (02/11/2004; 06/06/2005) have identified that the challenge of being a manager in an educational institution, is finding that balance between knowing your people and supporting your people and looking after your students. The challenge is that sometimes what people want to do is not in the best interests of the students. I accept that putting your individual concerns first is a primary human need and is identified as a significant filter in the creation of knowledge. However my primary responsibility as an educational administrator is to the needs of my students. The different needs can lead to conflict.*

### 7.4.3 Newly identified

In discussing relationships with teachers UR indicated that ‘the best managers I’ve ever had have been people whose management style has almost been imperceptible. You’re talking about formal and informal and you wouldn’t know when they were being formal unless they told you’ (UR conversation, 10/07/2005, p.13). The need for a manager to be resilient and smiling can be positioned within the relationship filter as UR (10/06/2005, p. 14) indicated that managers need to be observant and aware of what is happening in the people around them.



*UR’s comments reflect Stacey’s (2000) conceptualisation of the legitimate and the shadow organisation. And also reflects Snowden’s work (2002b) on compliance or camouflage behaviour. The question remains as to whether the summary model reflects this conceptualisation. From within the context of multiple realities a manager who believes that there is only one reality, that is, the legitimate way, will make an edict, this is what will happen or this is what occurred. Whereas if I am a manager who acknowledges that there are multiple realities and for any process I put in place it’s going to be interpreted and implemented in a whole range of different ways.*

## 7.5 STUDENTS AT RISK GROUP

As a result of the Student at Risk Group's engagement with the original summary model fundamental changes were made to the model. As the group problematised my practices as an administrator and further contested and conceptualised knowledge and its creation and management, they moved the summary model through three distinct versions. The level of engagement with both the model and the investigation topic was much greater than demonstrated by other scenario group members participating in their relevant conversations. An indication of the group's level of engagement and the extent of their thinking is evidenced in the significant changes to the summary model as illustrated in the three versions of the summary model presented as Figures 7, 8 and 9. These changes are discussed later in this section.

The process that I employed in working with the group was as outlined earlier in chapter 3 with the only variation being that two conversations were undertaken. The conversations occurred on 1 June 2005 and at the request of group members a second conversation was undertaken on 10 June 2005. Four participants from the original group scenario group conversation participated in the first conversation and five of the original group participated in the second conversation. In the period between the two conversations a number of informal conversations also occurred between various members of the group. From these conversations developed an interim model (Figure 8) presented to all group members at the commencement of the 10 June 2005 conversation and which had a significant influence on the development of Figure 9. The transcript of the conversations is available from the author upon request.

The analysis framework used in this section highlights was:

- re-affirmation of the cycle 1 issues;
- summary model changes; and
- identification of any new issues.

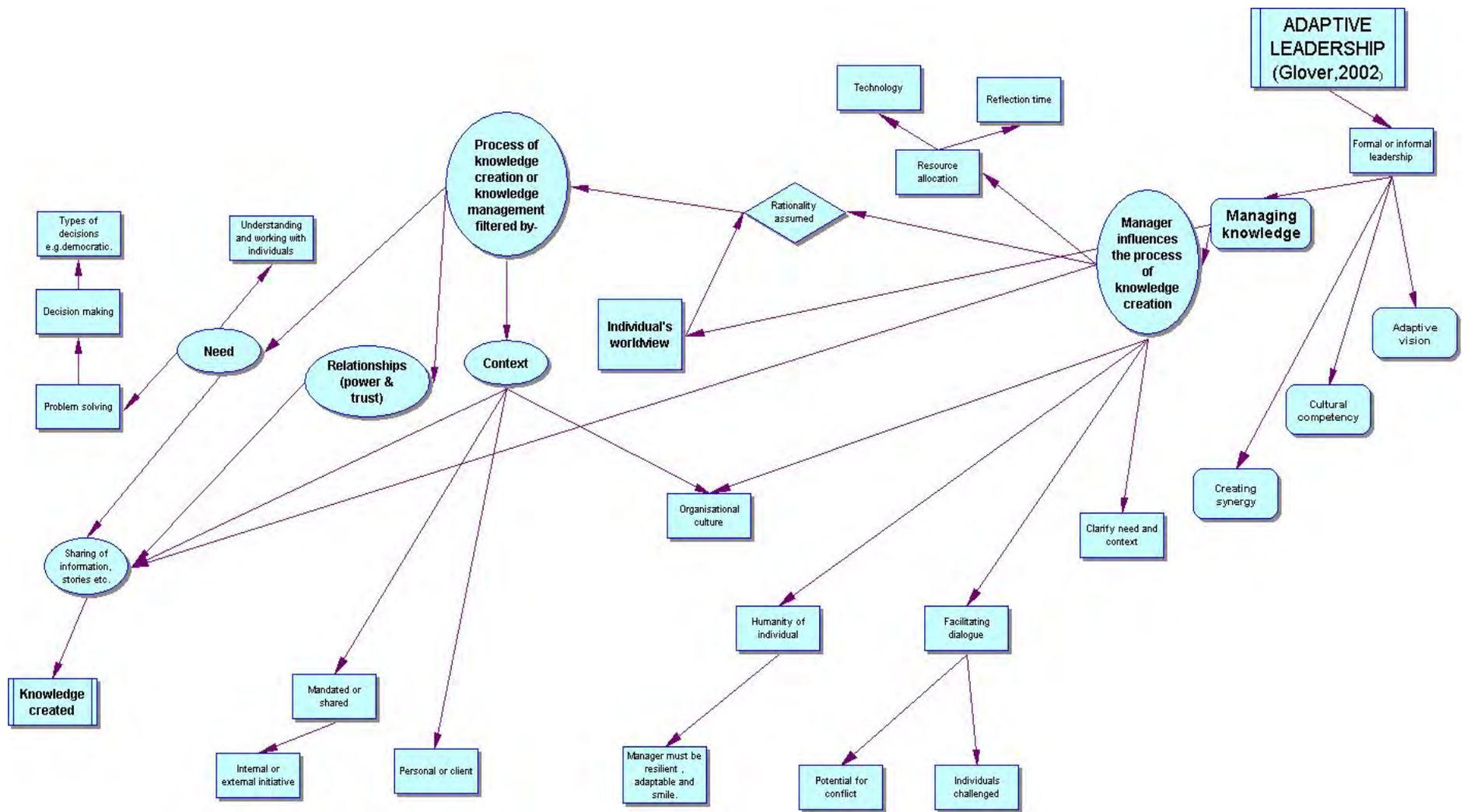
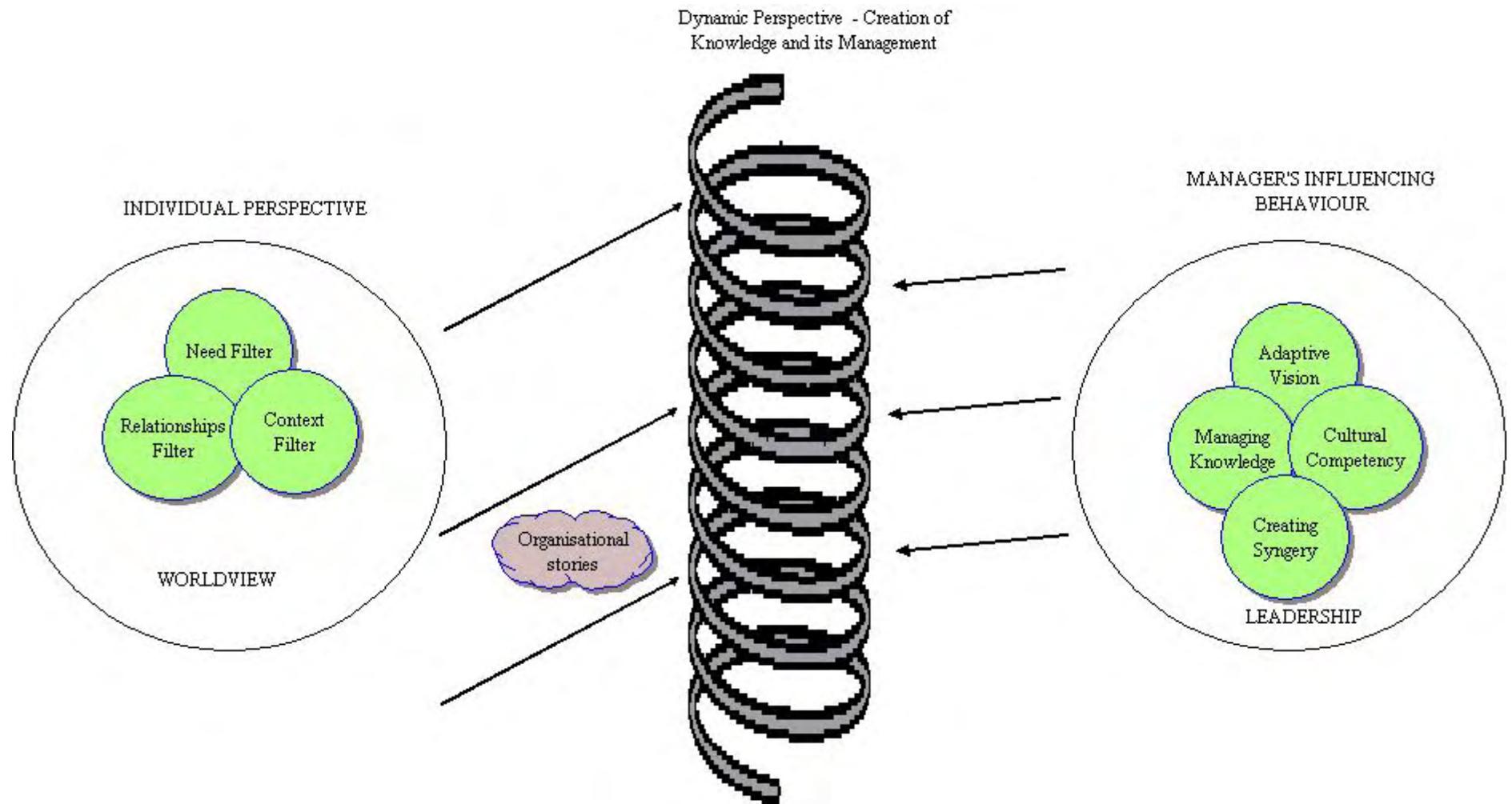
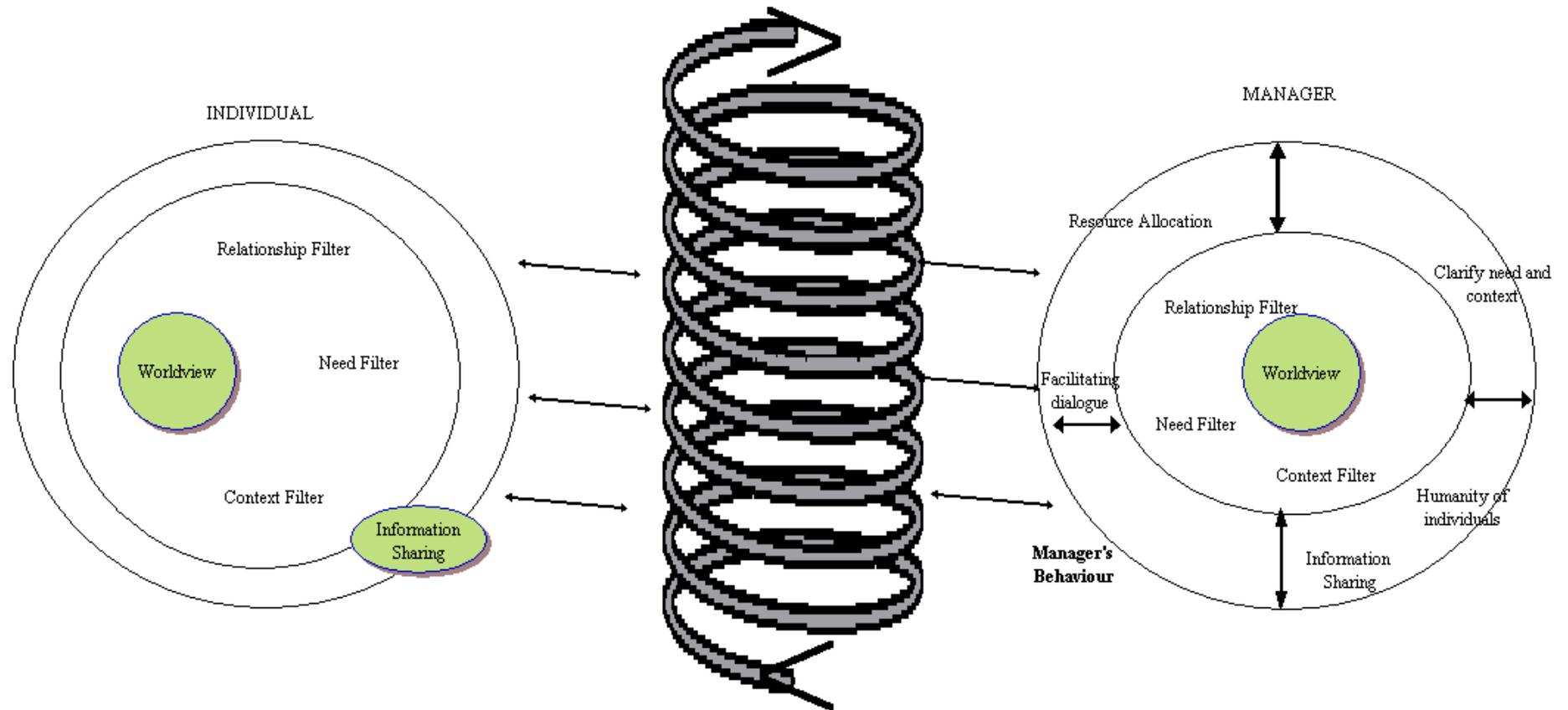


Figure 7. Students at Risk summary model interim version 1 June 2005.



**Figure 8.** Students at Risk summary model interim version 10 June 2005.

Dynamic Perspective - Creation of  
Knowledge and its Management



*Figure 9. Students at Risk summary model final amendments 10 June 2005*

### 7.5.1 *Re-affirmed*

During the conversation the issue of distinguishing between information and knowledge was again raised. It was acknowledged that the terms knowledge and information were often used interchangeably (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.6). In seeking to clarify the relationship between information and knowledge and develop a better understanding, a diversity of stories was used to contextualise examples that clarified individual member's views. Indicative of the conversation is Artefact 25. A significant issue within each of the stories was the influence of filtering information to support the creation of knowledge reflecting a particular worldview, a practice commonly employed by politicians and the media to generate support from a particular social grouping.



*The literature (Snowden, 2002a) identified as the first generation of knowledge management suggests that there is a simple continuum between data, information and knowledge and presents it as being a logical flow. I challenge the logical and simplistic portrayal and agree that the terms knowledge and information are often used interchangeably.*

#### **Artefact 26. Students at Risk group conversation (03/06/2005, p.4).**

Member: Knowledge is put at the lowest level of what already exists in the world, that is already known – because knowledge means known I suppose, and then you process that information to create new, I suppose it's to create new knowledge isn't it?

Paul D: ...So I'm arguing that until you have it in you, in other words until it is constructed in you and you can use it, it's only information, it's only just an artefact of information.

Member: There's an enormous amount of ...manipulation possibly.

The reality of an administrator managing another person's knowledge was again challenged. One member argued that they did not believe that you can manage someone else's knowledge but rather 'you can influence it, inspire it, but I don't know that you can actually manage' (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.10). The challenge was provided by another member who suggested 'people are manipulated all the time' (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.10).

The group also revisited power issues within the group compared with within the wider organisation. They reinforced that as individuals they had brought minimal

baggage to the group and that we had collaboratively refined the function of the group. In situating power within the model it was suggested that the issues associated with power, truth and trust were seen to be situated within the relationship filter (Students at Risk conversation, 10/06/2005, p.14). It was also suggested that power could also be evidenced as the manager's influence on the allocation of resources (Students at Risk conversation, 10/06/2005, p.14). The group identified that my most significant influence on the group was to influence the development of the group's culture. I minimised the power influences within the group and from outside the group onto the group (Students at Risk conversation, 10/06/2005, p.13).

### *7.5.2 Summary model changes*

The versions of the model (Figures 7, 8 and 9) provide a clear overview of the developing thinking generated through the conversation. It is important for the reader to understand that while the conversations were undertaken in a linear fashion the creation of knowledge was not linear and did not occur in a logical lock-step fashion. The images of the changing model are only snapshots of thinking at a point in time. In highlighting the changes to the model I have not moved to explain the micro level of each evolving change as this would be both time consuming and confusing for the reader.

In discussing the changes made I have identified the significant conceptual changes associated with each version of the model. The significant changes were:

- refocus the model and make explicit my influence as manager;
- challenge the linearity of the model; and
- highlight the dynamic nature of the model

The following sections use these three changes to provide a more detailed explanation of the evolution of the model. References are made to the relevant versions of the model.

### **Refocus the model**

In seeking to clarify specifically what the summary model represented, the group forced me to re-clarify in my mind that this research was a self-study, a practitioner investigation, 'the topic is really about how you as a manager operate, rather than how the whole big picture operates' (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.12). Consequently the group suggested that if my practice related to knowledge creation there was limited value in placing the other three leadership principles (Glover, 2002) in the summary model. 'These other three were brought in through a theory that we haven't looked at' (Students at Risk conversation, 10/06/2005, p.10). The resultant action was to move the leadership framework to the right hand side and leave only managing knowledge from the Glover (2002) framework as this is the particular area of influence that is the focus of this investigation.

### **Challenge the linearity of the model**

The group members also challenged the implicit message of linearity suggested by the model. The following quotes support the perspective that knowledge creation is multi-layered, complex and unclear. Presenting a two dimensional visual representation requires careful conceptualisation. 'That's what the linear model sort of does. It's not how things actually happen, it's how you're looking at – if it was like ideal these are the steps that this part has actually gone through...What our linear diagrams tend to suggest is that we have this point, A, where all the knowledge is created and the stories are shared, but in reality what you've diagrammed, as you've shown there, is that within an organisation those stories are shared at different times' (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.17).

Continuing with the challenges of the model's impression of linearity there is a need to reflect the reality that stories are shared at various stages and points in the organisation. The use of clean straight lines and arrow heads creates an image of clarity, certainty and single direction in the process. Once again the reality does not match this representation. 'People who do that have defined data and information

and knowledge in a way that allows you to draw the arrows, but it can be a bit fuzzy' (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.6). The complexity and dynamic nature of the model could be enhanced through the use of double headed arrows. Changing arrows in such a way would help to present the reality that as knowledge develops, needs can change or relationships can change.

### **Dynamic nature of the model**

The final version of the Student at Risk model is divided into three sections: individual (left), manager (right) and the creation of knowledge and its management (centre). These three sections are used as a framework to explain the model.

The left hand side represents the individual organisational member from the perspective of knowledge creation. Through their worldviews of knowledge, individuals filter the requests that they receive for their knowledge and make choices related to opportunities for the sharing of their knowledge and the creation of new knowledge. The requests are processed through three significant filters: the relationship filter, needs filter and context filter. It is these filters that determine what information individuals share with others and how individuals respond in knowledge creation situations. Situated outside the filters is another circle representing information sharing. . There is a multitude of ways within an organisation that information is shared. These include through stories, workshops, the intranet, chat groups, on-line forums and through conflict situations. Information sharing is linked to knowledge creation with the relationship being represented with two headed arrows.

The right hand side of the model represents my influence on the creation and use of knowledge. In looking at the influence that my behaviour as an administrator can have on the knowledge creation spiral a number of behaviours were identified. The behaviours included resource allocation, facilitating dialogue and clarifying need and context. It is not suggested that this is an exhaustive list as there could be others. These behaviours may collectively influence the culture of the organisation (Students at Risk conversation, 10/06/2005, p.13).

The centre of the model represents the creation of knowledge. From the sharing of information can come the creation of knowledge. The spiral central to the model can indicate either the individual, in other words, 'their knowledge creation as an ongoing process, or it could also represent the organisation saying that individuals can enter into that knowledge creating spiral at any point of time' (Students at Risk conversation, 10/06/2005, p.11). The spiral could be conceptualized as the administrator and the individuals within the organisation coming together and creating knowledge (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.20). Significantly with the spiral there is no starting point and there is no end point, it is all encompassing. Within different scenarios individuals will handle the information differently. They may or may not create new knowledge. They may also create very different knowledge from the information provided. This new knowledge would then be moved back to the individual as represented by the two way arrows, it would be filtered and could potentially influence an individual's worldviews.



*During the formal and informal conversations the individuals in the group went through several spirals of dialogue as they searched for understanding of the model. However even at the end of 2 hours of taped conversation and agreement in the group that the final version of the model did accurately reflect their thinking, dialogue could have continued with further refinement of the model occurring. The group, including myself in the role of manager had demonstrated the behaviours represented in the final version of their model. The hermeneutic of the knowledge creation spiral was central to both their conversation and their model.*

### *7.5.3 Newly identified*

The group introduced the issue of organisational culture. In accepting that organisations have their own cultures the group (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.7) indicated that managers exert a significant influence on culture. The group acknowledged that information sharing as indicated in Figure 9 was an indicator of culture. They indicated that cultural descriptors were, creative, toxic and competitive. In seeking to expand the discussion on culture I questioned whether the culture of their group mirrored the culture of the organisation? Overwhelmingly the

response was in that the Students at Risk group culture was very different. An explanation for the group's different culture included, 'I think it gets back to that trust; we're all on an equal footing, there's no one trying to step up or take control; shared vision of we want to help students; I also think that the group is made up of people that have probably a very different perspective on the big world' (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.16).

In drawing upon Glover's (2002) leadership model, the issue of leadership vision was discussed: (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.7). It was suggested that if organisational members didn't know what an administrator's vision was they couldn't bring new knowledge because they wouldn't know what was needed. The relationship between vision and need is important to be clarified as an administrator's vision could be coercive and the achievement of a leader's vision could simply be about meeting their need. As indicated by a group member (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.7), 'we all start with a vision of what the world should look like, our perfect world. But then by gaining inputs from all sorts of places, that vision can change and move'. The capacity to change vision can be conceptualised within Figure 9 by embracing the two-way flow between worldviews and knowledge creation.

## 7.6 SIGNIFICANT THEMES

For me the significant issues arising from the cycle 2 conversations were as follows.

- Individuals make decisions based on either minimizing pain or maximizing reward. The reality for administrators is that it is not possible to fully manage such cause and effect relationships (Snowden, 2002b). The challenge for an educational administrator is knowing and supporting teachers and looking after students (executive conversation, 02/11/2004; 06/06/2005).
- The challenge for an administrator is how to respond to those individuals in the organization who do not wish to engage in knowledge creation processes. Possible practices are to employ influencing behaviours as indicated in the summary model or accept the reality that some individuals will choose not to engage (personal reflection).

- The decision making need of an administrator may be influenced by their ontology, with an administrator who is accepting of multiple realities being more comfortable in accepting that there may not be just one correct decision in a particular situation. In accepting multiple realities an administrator also must accept multiple solutions each with their own risk and reward (UR conversation, 10/06/2005).
- The presentation of the model in a two dimensional and linear manner does not accurately represent the reality of knowledge creation. It creates an impression of clarity, certainty and a single direction in the process. The model should present the complex and dynamic nature of knowledge creation (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005).
- There was re-affirmation of the reality that the terms knowledge and information are used interchangeably (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005). It is important that individuals clarify their worldview of knowledge.
- The attainment of an organisational vision or goal can be supported by an administrator regularly revisiting the context and need of the goal (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005).

Finally a significant issue associated with this round of conversations was the different level of engagement each of the scenario groups had with the summary model. The engagement resulted in three iterations of the summary model. Two of the models had minor changes and one was significantly different. The Students at Risk group had the most engagement with the model and the most discussion about its conceptualization. It was this feedback that particularly influenced my reflections on the information collected during transcriptions of the conversations. It was the Student at Risk version of the summary model that had the greatest influence on my development of Figure 10 which presents knowledge management as a dynamic process. Figure 10 is discussed in the next chapter where I elaborate on my learnings from my investigations.

## 8 MY RESEARCH LEARNINGS

Chapter 8 presents the relevant learnings generated through my research. Chapter 1 argued that the focus of the professional doctorate was to advance knowledge within practice and subsequently result in my personal development and the advancement of my profession (Hoddell, Street & Wildblood, 2002). The use of the living theory approach to action research allowed me to ask questions and reflect on my professional practice. Through asking questions about how to improve my professional practice, living theory action research became a way of doing research that generated a personal theory for living (McNiff, 2000) and supported the development of a model, Figure 10, reflecting this theory.

Chapter 1 also presented the view that new knowledge produced in dissertations may only be new to a practitioner or local audience (Riehl et al., 2000). New then should be seen as a relative concept which is inherent in the relationship between research, researchers and audiences. Good research speaks to three primary audiences and basically it 'is for me, for us, and for them' (Marshall & Reason, 1993, p.117). The new learnings from my research speak to me, the practitioner investigator, as much as they speak to a wider academic audience. The value of my learnings is determined as much by me as by an external audience.

My learnings have been developed and tested during the life of my investigations through reconnaissance and two cycles of conversations undertaken with individual scenario groups, dialogue with my critical friends and my ongoing personal reflections. Central to the cycle 1 research conversations was the scenario group survey which acted as a framework for the conversations and provided feedback on my professional practice within the context of knowledge management.

To present the new knowledge developed through my research activities I have used the following 3 dimensions of learning as a framework:

- professional knowledge;
- self learning; and
- administrator (practitioner) researcher knowledge.

The use of such a presentation framework does not imply that all learnings can be neatly categorised. It is important to acknowledge that some learnings cannot be neatly placed into one category within the framework and that my research learnings can embrace a number of the identified areas of the framework. An example of such blurring in my theory for living is evidenced where professional practice and understanding of self are intertwined. This intertwining can make it difficult to distinguish between professional knowledge and self learning. Equally challenging is the isolation, as a single dimension within my professional practice, of those professional learnings associated with knowledge management.

### *Professional knowledge*

I have presented those learnings related to my professional knowledge as propositions about the ‘how’ of my professional practice and its influence on the creation and management of knowledge. As propositions they represent my understandings at this point of my practitioner research and within the context of my profession, educational administration. These propositions supported the development of a model, Figure 10, presenting knowledge management as a dynamic process. Importantly, the propositions are not made as statements of fact related to all educational administrators in all contexts. Rather these propositions are a reflection of my personal theory of practice which is by definition unique to me. It is conceivable and highly desirable that different audiences will respond to individual propositions in very different ways. Within this dimension of learning I have employed strategy boxes containing thoughts derived from my Reflective Journal to provide further insight into my practice.

### *Self learning*

I have also identified those areas of learning that have occurred as I have generated a living theory of my practice and are specifically about myself. These learnings which are identified as self learnings have resulted in my development of new knowledge or the refinement and substantiation of areas of my existing knowledge. It is my belief that these self learnings have been the catalyst for sustained change in my behaviour.

### *Administrator researcher knowledge*

Chapter 1 argued that the focus of the professional doctorate is the enhancement of professional practice through applied investigation (QUT, 2005). As such those learnings associated with working as an administrator (practitioner) researcher are also central to my investigations. Later in this chapter these learnings are provided as a number of reflections with a particular focus on the reconnaissance activity of living theory approach to action research.

The next section presents 9 propositions related to my understandings the capacity of an administrator to influence the sharing of information, the creation of knowledge and its subsequent use. The model of knowledge management as a dynamic process is represented as Figure 10 and elaborated upon.

#### 8.1 PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 3 highlighted that my use of the living theory approach to action research particularly supported my investigation into the ‘how’ questions of my professional practice (McNiff, 2000). Through asking questions about how to improve my professional practice, living theory action research became a way of doing research that generated a theory for living (McNiff, 2000) which embraced a growth in my professional knowledge and my self learning. The following propositions related to my professional knowledge represent my theory for living within the context of an administrator influencing the sharing of information and the creation and use of knowledge.

- **Proposition 1:** As an administrator my practices when working with knowledge are a reflection of my ontology and epistemology. To consciously vary my professional practices to facilitate knowledge creation and management it is essential for me to make my ontology and epistemology explicit.
- **Proposition 2:** My professional practices related to information sharing and knowledge creation are directly influenced by psycho-social filters. Three primary psycho-social filters are context, need and relationships.

- **Proposition 3:** The influence of the relationship filter on my knowledge creation activities is directly linked to the relationships that exist between me and those involved in the knowledge activities. The ongoing capacity for my professional practices to influence knowledge creation is linked through relationships by my personal resilience.
- **Proposition 4:** My knowledge influencing practices are those practices that support the provision of opportunities for information sharing and the creation of knowledge with the specific intent of applying that knowledge in an organisational context. A primary application of the created knowledge is decision making.
- **Proposition 5:** Knowledge creation is an ongoing process and knowledge is only relevant at a point in time and applicable in a particular context.
- **Proposition 6:** My professional practices that influence information sharing, knowledge creation and decision making are explicit iterations of my power as an administrator.
- **Proposition 7:** Involvement in the decision making process is one of my key roles as an administrator. Decision making is a major example of the creation and use of knowledge within a school.
- **Proposition 8:** I acknowledge that stories are a valuable way for individuals to share information and they can act as a catalyst for the creation of knowledge.
- **Proposition 9:** Using the knowledge management discourse as a framework to support the critique of my professional practice challenges its branding as a management fad.

In demonstrating an acceptance that no knowledge is context free and to bring meaning to my personal theory of practice, I have elaborated on my propositions

through the model (Figure 10) presenting the creation and management of knowledge as a dynamic process. The evolution of the model was discussed in detail in chapter 7. It is important that Figure 10 be acknowledged as a representation of the knowledge management dimension of my role as an administrator, a representation that was tested with and endorsed by executive members (02/11/2004).

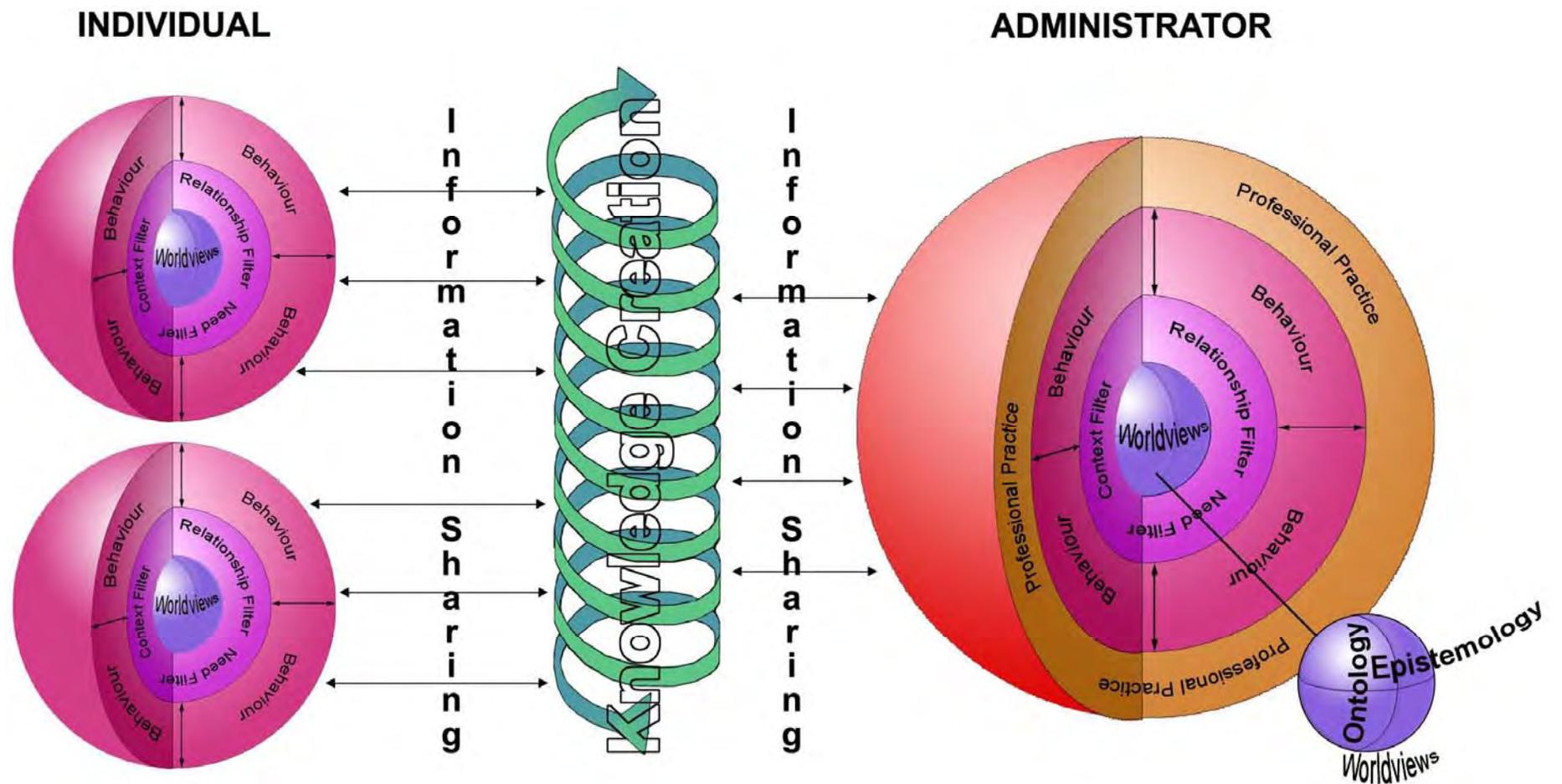


Figure 10. Knowledge management as a dynamic process.

The model consists of three main segments: individual (left), administrator (right) and information sharing and the creation of knowledge (centre). As the focus of this research is my practice as an administrator, I have commenced the examination of the nine propositions with the right hand segment, ‘Administrator’.

**Proposition 1: As an administrator my practices when working with knowledge are a reflection of my ontology and epistemology. To consciously vary my professional practices to facilitate knowledge creation and management it is essential for me to make my ontology and epistemology explicit.**

The right hand side of Figure 10 highlights my capacity as an administrator to influence the creation of knowledge. My behaviour as an administrator is based upon my worldviews which I have argued in chapter 2 can be represented by a matrix where the worldviews of individuals are constructed around beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) and beliefs about how such reality can be known (epistemology) (Bawden & Woog, 1998), as illustrated in Figure 10.1. My ontology openly accepts the potential of multiple realities. My practice based epistemology, supports a worldview of knowledge as a process or a flow (Snowden, 2002a).



**Figure 10.1. Worldviews subsection of Figure 10.**

Ultimately it is my behaviour as an administrator that can influence the dynamic of information sharing and knowledge creation as depicted by the spiral central to the model. My professional practices that influence the sharing of information and the

creation of knowledge are primarily controlled by my worldviews (personal reflections, 20/07/2004). My worldviews focus my practice on supporting the creation of knowledge rather than on the manipulation of knowledge objects, requiring me to operate in a dynamic environment where the sharing of information and the creation of knowledge is encouraged. This contrasts to professional practice within the controlled and sanitised environment of information and communication technologies where information or its misnomer, knowledge, is digitised and stored.

In accepting this dynamic conceptualisation of the creation of knowledge the common representation of data, information, knowledge and wisdom along a developmental continuum is also challenged. The reality can be that 'one person's knowledge is another's information' (personal reflections, 21/01/2005; Student at Risk conversation, 10/06/2005) and consequently it can be extremely difficult, albeit impossible for me to control the dynamic evolution of information to knowledge.

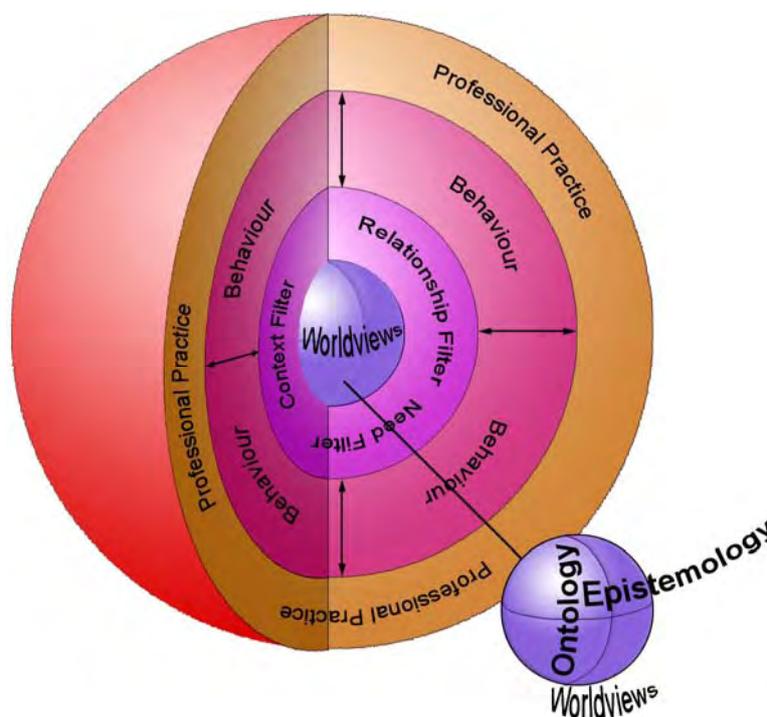
An awareness of my ontological worldview with its associated acceptance of multiple realities encourages me to examine my practices as an administrator differently and allows me to view organisational behaviour differently. I become less prone to judgemental behaviour from a perspective of right and wrong and more likely to seek an understanding of a particular scenario and an appreciation for how these scenarios develop. Subsequently within my practice each organisational scenario requires me to create my own reality with a unique interpretation of events based on the different understandings, motives and reasoning of individuals as I act and react with my environment (Melrose, 1996). My construction of multiple realities influences how I work with individuals and groups by increasing the necessity for me to have meaningful dialogue with organisational members. It also influences how I respond to a range of organisational scenarios by requiring me to be willing and open to changing my interpretation and response to individual organisational scenarios.

It is significant that while worldviews are central to how I work as an administrator, they are not fixed or 'set in stone'. My worldviews can be changed through dialogue with this potential for change of worldviews being represented by the two directional arrows in Figure 10.

**Proposition 2: My professional practices related to information sharing and knowledge creation are directly influenced by psycho-social filters. Three primary psycho-social filters are context, need and relationships.**

As indicated on the right hand side of Figure 10, and illustrated as Figure 10.2, as an administrator there are various filters through which I interpret and process events and requests associated with various organisational scenarios as I act and react with them. Andrews and Delahaye (2003) classified such filters as psycho-social filters. I am suggesting that the primary psycho-social filters associated with knowledge creation are context, need and relationships. When making decisions about the sharing of information, my actions and reactions are processed, consciously or unconsciously, through these primary filters. They may also be processed through a number of other secondary filters. My practitioner imperative to create knowledge is also influenced by these filters as illustrated in the example illustrated in Figure 10.2. As an administrator my awareness of the influence of psycho-social filters enhances my ability to understand and respond to organisational scenarios.

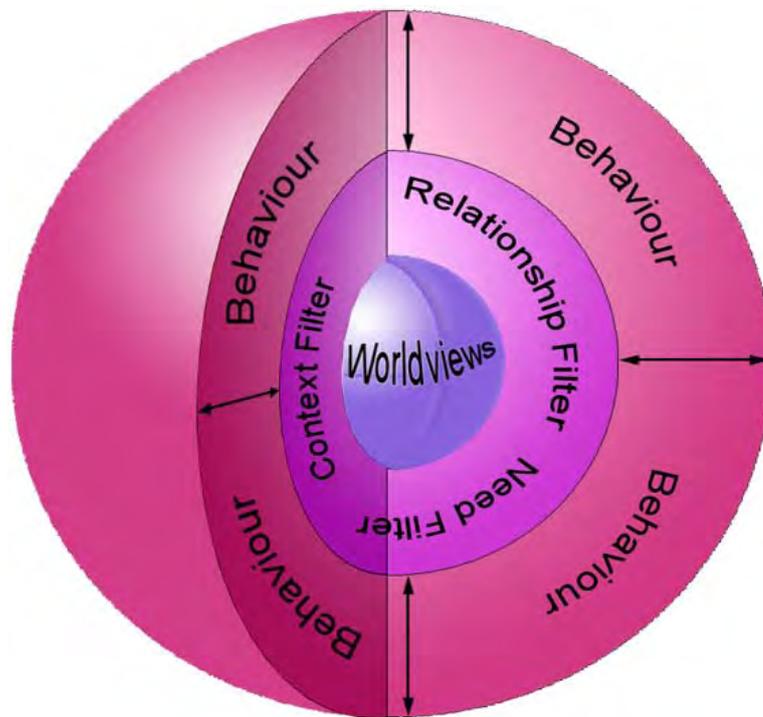
### ADMINISTRATOR



*Figure 10.2. Professional practice subsection of Figure 10.*

Mirroring my processes as an administrator, other individuals within the organisation also make personal decisions about the sharing of information. The left hand side of Figure 10, as represented by Figure 10.3, illustrates that individuals within the organisation make decisions related to the sharing of information by processing through the same psycho-social filters that I process through, that is, context, need and relationship. These filters are similarly linked to the individual's worldviews.

### INDIVIDUAL



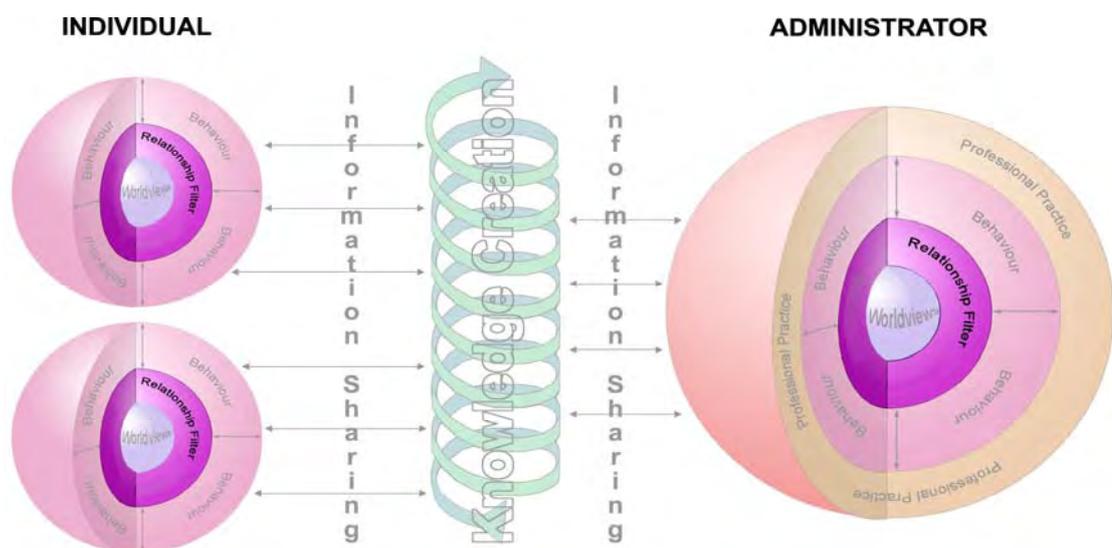
**Figure 10.3. Individual subsection of Figure 10.**

The convergence of worldviews and psycho-social filters is evidenced in each individual within the organisation and in every scenario each time that I make a request for or stimulate the sharing of information. The combining influences of worldviews and filters determine that each individual's sharing and subsequent creation of knowledge will be different. The uniqueness of individual actions and reactions highlights why the management of knowledge creation and information sharing is a challenging dimension of professional practice for me as an administrator.

**Proposition 3: The influence of the relationship filter on my knowledge creation activities is directly linked to the relationships that exist between me and those involved in the knowledge activities. The ongoing capacity for my professional practices to influence knowledge creation is linked through relationships by my personal resilience.**

As modelled on the right hand side of Figure 10, the primary filters are influential in two directions, being from my worldviews to the organisational environment and from the organisational environment to me. The influence of filters is evidenced in individual organisational members, as indicated on the left hand side of the figure. In summary, the filters influence my behaviours and the behaviours of other organisational members and this influences this behaviour leading to different relationships.

I am proposing that in knowledge creation activities the relationship filter as highlighted in Figure 10.4 is directly influenced by the relationships that exist between me and those involved in the knowledge activities. Relationships between individuals develop over time and can range from maturing or short term relationships through to mature or long term relationships. My proposition concurs with the assertion (Andrews, pers. comm., 02/05/ 2004) that the key human processes in knowledge management are relationships.



**Figure 10.4. Relationship filter of Figure 10 highlighted.**

In my professional practice examples of maturing relationships are those infrequent interactions with teachers which are strongly influenced by my interpersonal and communication skills. Proficiency in these skills allows my communication to be viewed in a positive and affirming light by organisational members. These interactions can have a cumulative influence and support the evolution of a maturing relationship into a mature relationship.

In my professional practice mature relationships are normally developed over longer time periods but can be developed over shorter periods through the influence of very emotionally intense organisational experiences. Mature relationships are more deeply held and are based on the intensity and frequency of interactions. One significant indicator of the existence of positive, mature and effective relationships is trust. The significant influence of trust on knowledge creation and the sharing of information was raised by critical friends (30/08/2004, p.2, 3, 4, 5) and scenario group members (Students at Risk conversation, 28/10/2004, A p.8; B p.2: HODs conversation, 11/02/2005). High levels of trust in the professionalism of their peers allow individuals to feel safe when sharing information. My relationships with others can be conceptualised from two perspectives.

Firstly, is the way that other people view my interactions with them and how I treat the individual person which represents my humanity towards others (critical friends conversation, 02/11/2004, p.6) and reflects my capacity to know my people (union representative conversation, 10/06/2005). My effectiveness in interacting with and understanding individuals is enhanced by my acceptance of multiple realities and the implications associated with these realities. Accepting multiple realities moves me from being judgemental of an individual and determining them as right or wrong, to seeking to identify the assumptions that underpin an individual's particular reality and subsequent behaviour. In accepting that reality is created by individuals within unique situations I need to be conscious that any action that I take can be subject to a number of interpretations and similarly any decision that I make can be subject to challenge by individuals.

Secondly, is the way in which I view other people's interactions and relationships with me (HODs conversation, 11/02/2005). How I internalise other's interactions with me and handle them is a measure of my resilience. As an educational

administrator there are demanding professional and emotional pressures exerted on me, some of these pressures cause me to question my sustainability or longevity in the administrator's role. I define sustainability as more than being able to endure the continuous grind associated with the practice of educational administration. It also includes feeling valued, being positive about myself and what I do, and enjoying my personal and professional life (personal reflections, 26/09/2005). Being resilient allows me to rebound from the negativities that are associated with my professional practice. My personal resilience supports the maintenance of my humanity and consequently influences the development and sustenance of relationships with others within the organisation and consequently resilience is directly related to my capacity to influence knowledge creation.

**Proposition 4: My knowledge influencing practices are those practices that support the provision of opportunities for information sharing and the creation of knowledge with the specific intent of applying that knowledge in an organisational context. A primary application of the created knowledge is decision making.**

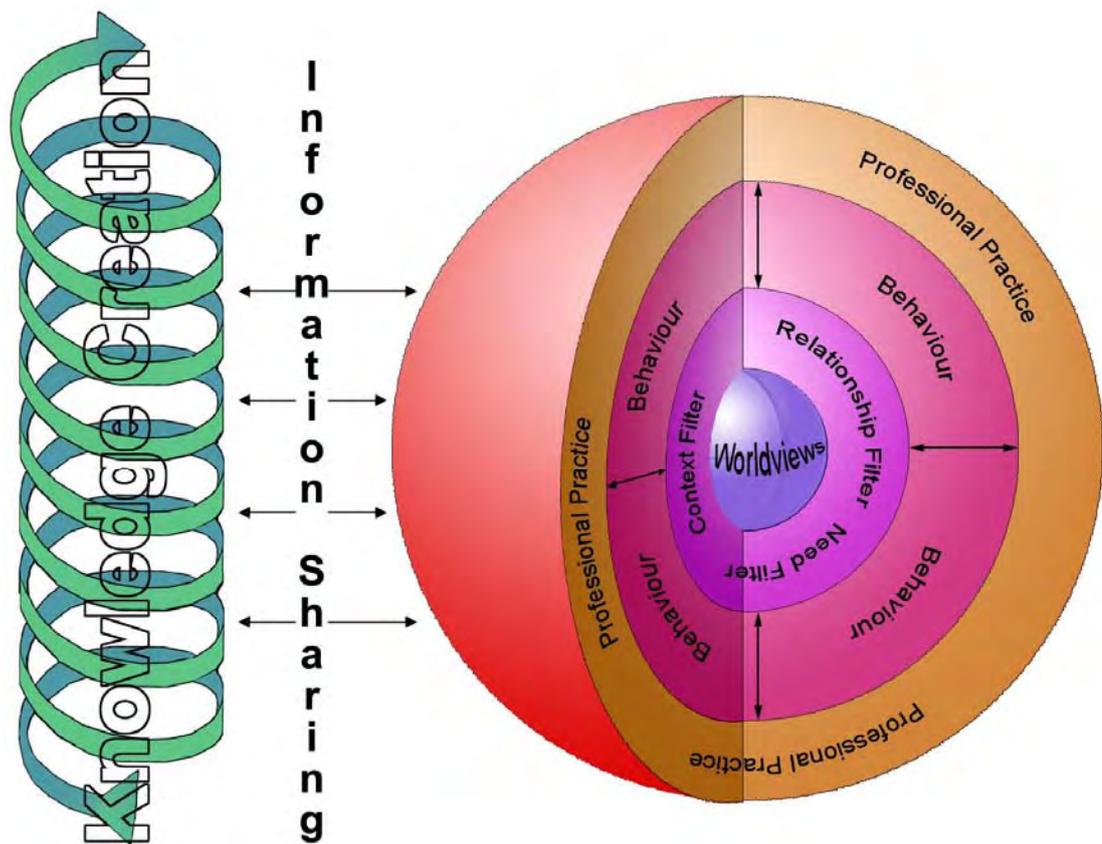
The knowledge management discourse identifies three broad types of knowledge management systems (Becerra-Fernandez & Stevenson, 2001). These systems loosely parallel the three evolutionary phases of knowledge management suggested by Snowden (2002a). The suggested functions of knowledge management systems are:

- the organisation and distribution of knowledge;
- the formalisation of knowledge; and
- the application of knowledge.

I have argued in chapter 2 that the first two functions identified above are more about the management of information and explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) rather than the creation of knowledge. The third function reflects the increasing focus of the knowledge management discourse on creating and managing knowledge to solve problems (Snowden, 2002a). All three broad types of knowledge management systems may exist within one organisation but each may be more

prevalent at various levels of the organisation and at different stages within the life cycle of an organisation (personal reflections, 9/11/2004).

The right hand side of Figure 10, as represented in Figure 10.5, models when all three functions of knowledge management are combined into one system. My behaviours influence the collection of information and the subsequent sharing of this information. The sharing of information with other organisational members, as indicated in the spiral, is central to the creation of knowledge. The ready access to information creates the potential for the creation of knowledge as discussed in the following strategy statement. Organisational culture should be reflected in decisions related to my influence as an administrator on the allocation of physical resources.



**Figure 10.5.** An administrator’s influence subsection of Figure 10.

The reality for me as an administrator is that when I present information to teachers in a diversity of ways and a range of contexts I am not creating knowledge but rather managing information and developing a context for the creation of knowledge (personal reflections, 21/06/2004). Ultimately the real challenges for me are whether individuals use the information for the creation of knowledge and subsequently share their knowledge with others in the school. One strategy that can address both of these challenges is the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as highlighted in the following strategy box.

### ***Strategy Box***

*ICT can be an effective tool to enable easier management of information and to support the sharing of information (personal reflections, 10/06/2004 as exemplified by:*

- *Knowledge creation- chat groups, forums and projects.*
- *Information sharing – placement of agendas and minutes on the intranet.*

*As an administrator seeking to support knowledge creation I have to use these resources and model these practises to stimulate the use of the ICT tools (personal reflections, 10/06/2004) and to support the construction of knowledge in individuals (personal reflections, 13/07/2004). The effective use of information technology requires that the administrator possesses the appropriate ICT skills. Facilitation and communication skills are also required.*

*The maintenance and development of the appropriate ICT requires the provision of the necessary budget allocation. A resource allocation is also required to provide support staff to collect information, prepare for information sharing events, collate shared information and maintain the currency of information collected. Budgetary allocation for such a person or persons is often seen as a luxury. It will be important to provide IT skills development support (personal reflections, 12/07/2004).*

*Ultimately if I am an administrator who values knowledge creation my role is to advocate for the provision of these resources (personal reflections, 2/08/2004).*

Importantly I need to be aware that knowledge is created in every context within the organisation (personal reflections, 9/09/2004). Significantly human knowledge is triggered by circumstance and it is deeply contextual (Snowden, 2002b). From the perspective of the administrator some of that knowledge is legitimate knowledge (Stacey, 2000) the creation of which is encouraged by me the administrator because it suits my needs. Whereas other knowledge is less suited to my requirements as an administrator and can be seen to serve the needs of the shadow organisation (Stacey, 2000). Both the literature and my research conversations have indicated that it is more likely that information will be shared and legitimate knowledge created when

an environment of trust exists. The impact of trust on the creation of knowledge is evidenced in Stacey's (2000) legitimate and shadow systems within an organisation.

Administrators need to practice caution when they seek to facilitate the creation of knowledge through the activities of a formally appointed knowledge manager. The following strategy box identifies issues associated with this administrative approach to the creation of knowledge.

### ***Strategy Box***

*As an administrator I need to be careful in my practice that I don't appoint a person as the 'knowledge manager' within the organisation and delegate all responsibility for information collection and knowledge creation to that person. My practice should reflect that while the incumbent in such a position is valued, ultimately as administrator I am responsible for knowledge creation within the school. My professional practice should support an organisational culture where the open sharing of information is valued and (personal reflections, 5/11/2004) and that where appropriate this information is used in decision making and problem solving within the school. Others in the school may also have the responsibility for the management of information, web sites, the local intranet and data bases. There may be a differentiation in the responsibility for roles that are routinely linked to knowledge management, for example, ICT system protocols, maintaining ICT systems/databases, building relationships and developing opportunities for dialogue within the organisation (personal reflections, 21/01/2005).*

**Proposition 5: Knowledge creation is an ongoing process and knowledge is only relevant at a point in time and applicable in a particular context.**

As modelled by the spiral in the centre of Figure 10 knowledge creation is an ongoing process. Human knowledge is deeply contextual and it is triggered by circumstance (Snowden, 2002b). Within an organisation knowledge creation can involve one person or a number of individuals. It can involve the formal sharing of information within a structured event or the informal sharing of information between organisational members. Examples of information sharing include sharing through; stories, on-line chat groups, workshops and through situations of conflict. Depending on the value that individuals place on the exercise, they can choose to participate or not participate in the sharing of information and the associated creation of knowledge. Individuals may even take explicit responsibility for the sharing of

information. An individual's choice could be influenced by the psycho-social filters of context, need and relationships.

My practice requires that I need to be conscious of providing ongoing opportunities for organisational members to participate in the sharing of information and the creation of knowledge. My practice also demands awareness that decisions are made based on knowledge that exists at a point in time and consequently as new knowledge is generated the appropriateness of a decision can change. As an administrator some flexibility is required in my decision making processes to accommodate new knowledge.

I identified the following characteristics as being important in organisational situations demanding organisational change and the creation of new knowledge (personal reflections, 20/07/2004).

- Someone had ownership of the initiative.
- The initiative owner possessed a perspective that valued the sharing of information and the creation of knowledge.
- The relevant information was readily available and easily accessed through appropriate technology.
- The process for the sharing of information supported the creation of knowledge.

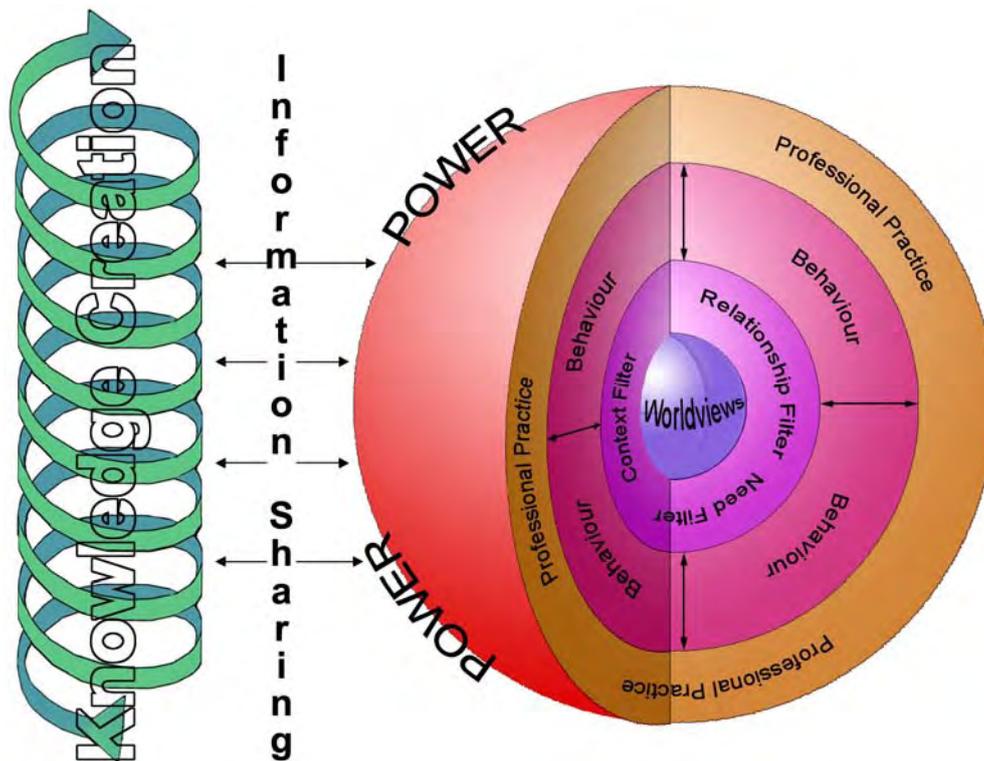
Time is a vital resource in information sharing and knowledge creation. For me as an administrator one challenge is how to create time for personal reflection and how to provide teachers with time for conversation and reflection to support information sharing and knowledge creation. An even bigger challenge is how to work with teachers who elect not to participate or resent being forced to participate in the opportunities provided.

**Proposition 6: My professional practices that influence information sharing, knowledge creation and decision making are explicit iterations of my power as an administrator.**

My practices related to the allocation of organisational resources exert varying degrees of influence over the knowledge created and subsequently decisions made within the organisation. In a framework conceptualised by the union representative (26/08/2004) and supported by my critical friends (02/11/2004) the influence of my practices on decision making can be classified into three broad types of influence or power.

1. Legal power- I can use the power of legislated law and I am also constrained by these laws.
2. Political power – I can demonstrate my power to influence and persuade.
3. Bureaucratic power – I can apply my positional power.

Each of these iterations of power can be evidenced in my behaviours as represented in Figure 10.6 and subsequently influence my professional practices specifically related to knowledge creation.



**Figure 10.6.** An administrator’s power influence subsection of Figure 10.

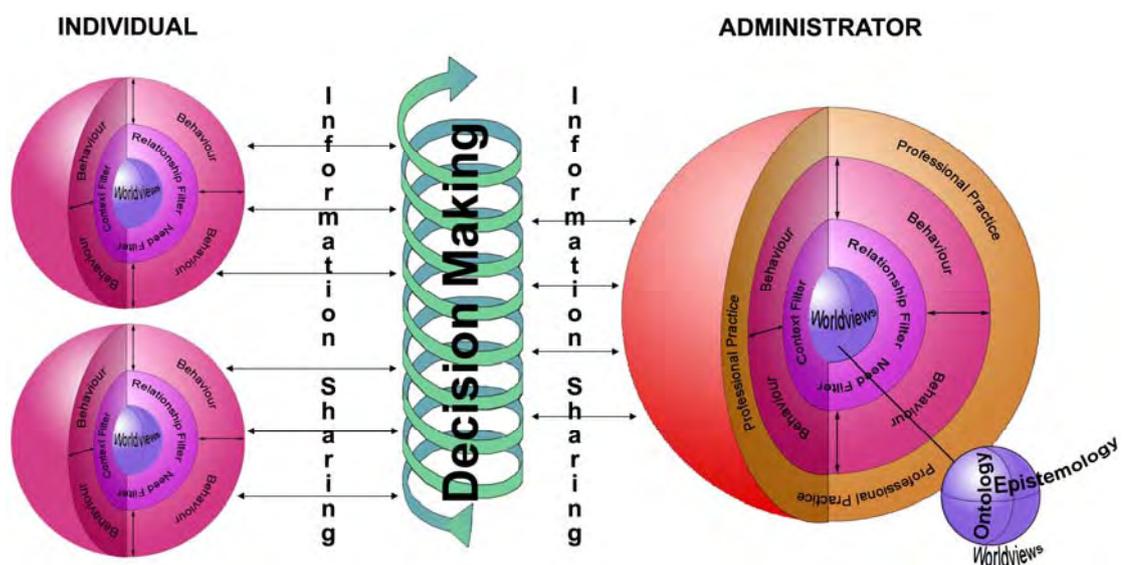
Within the context of educational administration it is legal power that is ultimately used to resolve disputes and make decisions in contested situations (union representative, 26/08/2004, p.8). Legal power becomes even more important when

little or no trust exists between organisational members. In such a context decisions are reached through industrial disputation, a process that rapidly identifies the multiple realities of the various stakeholders. The conflict that can be generated through industrial disputation can alternatively be viewed as a great catalyst for the creation of knowledge within the organisation or as a destructive influence within the organisation. Industrial disputation is one context for the creation of knowledge as represented in the spiral central to Figure 10.

**Proposition 7: Involvement in the decision making process is one of my key roles as an administrator. Decision making is a major example of the creation and use of knowledge within a school.**

The spiral at the centre of Figure 10.7 is a representation of the creation of knowledge which can be used to support decision making within the organisation. In exploring decision making 3 broad types of decisions were identified (critical friend conversation, 09/08/2004, p.4) with each type making different use of the knowledge created. The three types were:

1. democratic, we share and we democratically decide;
2. I collect information from a variety of sources and then I decide; and
3. I decide, without consultation.



**Figure 10.7. Decision making as a form of knowledge creation in Figure 10.**

In each type of decision there are varying levels of information sharing occurring with the levels of sharing being direct evidence of the influence of the psychosocial filters. A simple example of the influence of one filter is where trust is seen to influence decision making through the relationship filter (critical friend conversation, 02/11/2005). Where levels of trust are high individuals are more willing to share information in support of making decisions.

It was suggested that other's trust in my decision making capacity can be enhanced when there is a clearly understood approach to decision making which is consistently adopted (critical friend conversation, 02/11/2005). In clarifying my possible approaches to decision making I am proposing the following alignment between the three broad influencing or power types and the three decision making types:

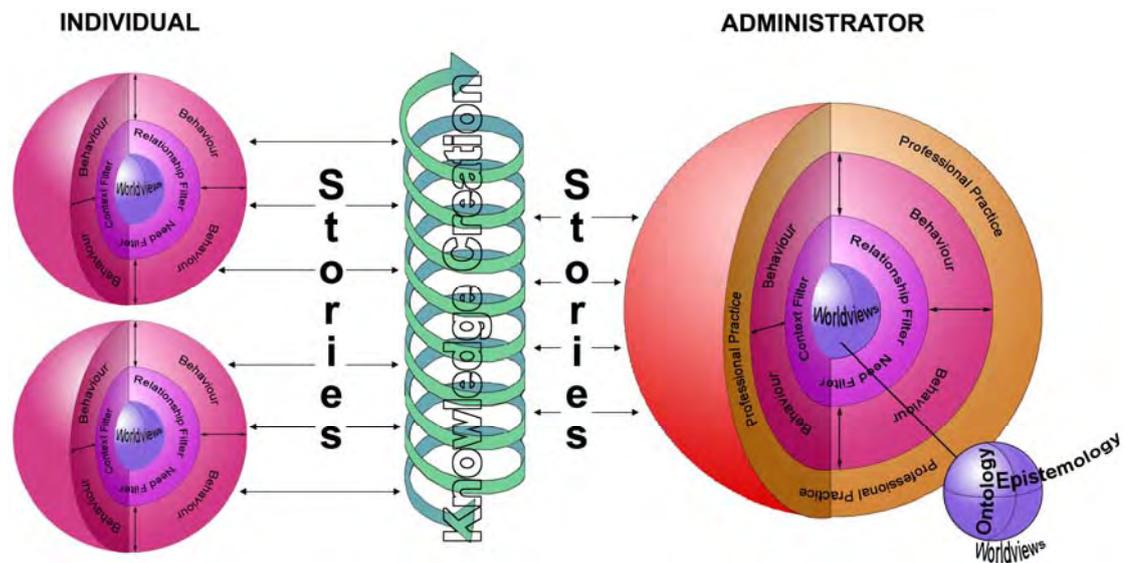
1. democratic and political power;
2. I collect and I decide and bureaucratic power; and
3. I decide and legal power.

It was identified that in my professional practice I could support decision making in the following ways (HODs scenario group conversation, 11/02/2005).

- Having an active role in the development of the governance model of the school.
- Having an active role in developing and maintaining communication channels within the school. Effective communication channels support the creation of complete knowledge and enable more effective decisions to be made within all sections of the organisation.
- Having an influence on the culture of the school.
- Supporting the development and continued articulation of a clear vision.
- Constantly challenge the assumption that specific knowledge is clear.
- Regularly acknowledging my awareness of major initiatives within each department.
- Being involved in decisions about the allocation of resources that would support managers to overcome time shortages.

**Proposition 8: I acknowledge that stories are a valuable way for individuals to share information and they can act as a catalyst for the creation of knowledge.**

The telling of stories as a means of sharing experiences was a regular occurrence within both the scenario group and critical friend conversations. Within Figure 10 stories could be seen as the point of information sharing, as represented in Figure 10.8. As an administrator the telling of stories must be valued and I should adopt strategies that encourage participants to reflect on the relevant messages and learnings contained within particular stories (personal reflections, 12/07/2004). Stories should be seen as a powerful method of sharing information and an effective catalyst for creating knowledge. Stories are particularly useful in sharing information within a common context. Stories are an example of the human side of knowledge management and are vital in facilitating the process (Denning, 2001). Stories are central to communities of practice. Stories require me to actually sit and listen.



**Figure 10.8. Stories as information sharing in Figure 10.**

**Proposition 9: Using the knowledge management discourse as a framework to support the critique of my professional practice challenges its branding as a management fad.**

As an administrator it is crucial for me to consider how I engage with management discourses. Ideally the discourse provides me as an administrator with a framework for reflection (personal reflections, 28/10/2004). Within the specific discourse of knowledge management my practice would not be a management fad as defined in chapter 2 but rather part of my epistemological positioning which provides an explanation of my practice as an educational administrator.

If I accept these discourses uncritically and seek to implement them without consideration of my practices I would be guilty of practicing management faddism which could rightly lead to cynicism from the other members of the organisation impacted upon by this current fad. The implementation of such a discourse may be more about satisfying my immediate needs as an administrator rather than undertaken in consideration of the particular organisational context and the relationships which exist within the organisation. Problems can arise if the discourse is uncritically accepted as the ultimate solution to a specific challenge. As an administrator I would require an adequate understanding of the theory related to the particular discourse, in this case, knowledge creation (executive conversation, 02/11/2004). A narrow theoretical base could adversely influence my capacity to critically examine a specific management discourse.

The danger for my professional practice is if the discourse is uncritically implemented in, or 'done to', an organisation. An even bigger danger is if I employ a consultant or staff member, to 'do it' to the organisation. In this situation I am really just an 'outsider' distanced from the reality of the implementation and resultant issues (personal reflections, 28/10/2004). This mirrors the 'at risk group' discussion about how individuals amend their practices for promotional purposes. If I am critically reflecting on my practice related to a discourse I should be continually refining and changing my practice (personal reflections, 26/09/2004). Knowledge management can be conceptualised as an iteration or a hermeneutic resulting from knowledge creation rather than as a fad. Applying critical reflection to other

management discourses can also be viewed as an iterative process with logical development following from previous iterations. This is a natural process and if it is viewed as such faddism is not an issue. The management tool should be seen as a point in time opportunity supporting the critical examination of one's professional practice.

## 8.2 SELF LEARNING

In this section I identify areas of learning specifically about myself that have occurred as I have generated a living theory of my practice. The self learning has resulted in my development of both new and refined understanding of myself and my practice. It is my belief that these self learnings have been the catalyst for sustained change in my behaviour. The learnings identified in this section are those that I considered to be significant learnings and as such they have directly influenced my worldviews. In reflecting my practice based epistemology any significant self learning should be clearly evidenced in my practice as modelled in Figure 10.

As a practitioner researcher I found it challenging to make legitimate claims to how my practice had changed, as opposed to how I perceived that my practice had changed. For me the ultimate test of the legitimacy of any stated change of practice was when my work colleagues identified changes in how I undertook my practice. Such authentication of my perceptions of my changed practices acknowledges my stated ontology of multiple truths and it accommodates the associated practical implication that my perceptions of self learning may not match the perceptions of my professional colleagues. It was for this reason that in my final conversations with all scenario groups I asked them to identify examples of where my studies had led to changes in my professional practice. I have sought to support my statements of self learning with evidence drawn from both my perceptions of self and the perceptions of others.

### 8.2.1 *Understanding my practice*

I have realised that during my time of formal study, at masters and doctoral levels, as I have continuously reflected on my learnings and my practice, my worldviews and

my ability to recognise my worldviews have been changing. Some of these changes were significant paradigm changes while others were simply the refinement and clarification of my worldviews. My changes in behaviour can be conceptualised within the context of Figure 1 (as discussed in chapter 2) and I now understand that my worldviews and practices have moved from the quadrant bounded by reductionism and objectivism to where I now increasingly prefer to operate within the quadrant bounded by subjectivism and holism. I have evolved from a task focused, outcomes driven manager, to a more reflective and supportive administrator (personal reflections, 19/10/2004). My practice is based on an acceptance of multiple truths and is strongly influenced by my professional experiences.

An example of the influence of these worldview changes is that I have changed the way that I interact with people. I have come to realise how important people's stories are and I am now more prepared to sit and listen to a person tell their story and accept that this story reflects their reality of a scenario which may be at odds with my reality of the same scenario. Truly listening to people makes my job harder because when I believed that mine was the only reality it was much easier to plan how to implement any change initiative. Once I accept that there are multiple realities and I stop and listen to a person's story and identify with that person and not simply see them as an object to be managed then my world becomes very complex (Students at Risk conversation, 03/06/2005, p.26). In effectively working with stories my practice requires a capacity and willingness to listen, combined with the ability to draw meaning from the stories.

One member of executive (06/06/2005, p.8) commented that they saw an alignment between my practice at meetings and the segment of Figure 4 related to the administrator's influencing. He indicated that increasingly my strengths, within a group situation, were the identification of the need and the context related to a particular issue that could be raised during a particular meeting. He identified that in my personal practice I am not reluctant to engage all players and that while I am aware that there could be conflict in a particular meeting I am prepared to follow through to engage the group members and to canvass all points of view. He

indicated that in conversations with him after these meetings that he could identify that I was reflective in terms of looking and challenging my perceptions and knowledge and that I was prepared to take on other views and follow through in subsequent meetings.

### 8.2.2 *A framework for reflection*

I have come to understand that I now frequently examine specific organisational initiatives and problems through a 'knowledge creation' lens. In applying this lens to the individual decisions that I make I am increasingly conscious of the influence of the psycho-social filters: relationships, need and context. The filters provide a framework for me to understand my practices associated with making decisions (personal reflections, 21/06/2004). An indication of the application of the framework were the union representative's perceptions that now when I am doing a presentation or discussing something with staff it tends to be more structured (UR, 10/06/2005). In a sense the structure is about trying to define things and provide a reference point. He suggested that it was my conscious effort to provide a context from which to move the discussion forward rather than from a control perspective.

In commenting on my practice a member of executive indicated that since my research had commenced I had demonstrated a stronger reflective practice (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.10). They suggested that an explanation for this reflective practice was the existence of a credible theoretical basis for knowledge management which supported and motivated my practice. A number of specific areas of reflection were identified as follows.

- What is the knowledge base that people are coming to me from?
- What knowledge do they have that might be different to my knowledge base?
- Is there more value in their knowledge?
- Is there something in their knowledge that I hadn't considered?

One outcome of this reflective practice (executive conversation, 06/06/2005, p.10) 'is that you've also got the capacity at the moment, because of the alliance with this study, to step back and say, oh well, I hadn't thought of that, and yes it is something that is valuable and now I need to rethink.'

I have clarified and subsequently strengthened my belief that to move any initiative forward it is important for me to be open and accountable, to have the dialogue around the specific issue and to confront any associated issues (personal reflections, 3/03/2005). In supporting this statement on my professional practice an executive member (06/06/2005, p.8) indicated that 'some management styles would see the potential conflict and perhaps look at ways to avoid that conflict which may not be good in terms of developing good knowledge and good organisation'. They also agreed that I acknowledge that there could be conflict, but still go ahead and ask the questions and seek the responses. Engaging in such practice can be personally demanding. I became conscious and in some scenarios, even self conscious, that my approach to managing the creation of knowledge is different to other members of executive. I found that my preparedness to listen to others, gather opinions and seek to understand their reality of a particular situation before taking action could be viewed as a weakness by some members of executive.

### *8.2.3 The significance of resilience*

Perhaps the most powerful personal learning came from my reflections on a workplace grievance initiated against me by a teacher. The grievance was the result of a management recommendation that I had made to the principal. As the first grievance initiated against me in the 26 years that I have worked in education it proved to be a powerful catalyst for reflection. The grievance brought together the theory and practice of working with knowledge. It caused truth and power to collide with perceptions and reality. The central point of managing knowledge became my need to keep functioning and other associated leadership rhetoric paled in significance against resilience. The absolute necessity for me as an administrator to be resilient and to keep smiling, to not collapse under the pressures of the grievance and its personal attack was starkly brought home to me. When one person's need,

context and relationships are mutually opposed to mine, very powerful and destructive forces are brought into play (personal reflections, 07/06/2005).

Knowledge creation and the grievance situation saw the coming together of the practical iteration of my research, that is, worldviews, multiple realities, context, relationships, needs, trust (loyalty), power and resilience. At that time and in the context of my professional practice, the greatest of these was resilience, as it was resilience that stopped me from being unable to function in my role as an administrator. While I understood the other person's reality and how the conflict situation had occurred, it was more significant for me as an administrator to sustain my practice.

#### *8.2.4 Conversation and the creation of my knowledge*

A significant self learning during my research was that I increasingly became aware that I prefer to learn through interaction and discussion of issues with others. My natural preference to use conversation and verbalisation as a means of creating knowledge became apparent (personal reflections, 15/05/2005). The interactions associated with the conversations create new questions and consequently new knowledge (personal reflections, 10/06/2005). These interactions are representative of the knowledge creation spiral central to Figure 10.

Understanding this preference for active engagement in conversation explains why, during a meeting, I struggle to remain silent once I have become engaged in a specific conversation. An awareness of this propensity also highlights the challenges that confront my capacity to listen when engaged in conversation. While engaged in conversation I have a propensity to be considering my response to issues identified during the conversation which diminishes my attentiveness while listening to the conversation.

### 8.2.5 *Conditions for reflection*

From a personal perspective I have also become aware that one of the best scenarios for reflection was when I was exercising. When my mind was clear of external influences the thinking came. It was my opportunity for generating knowledge, for making implicit knowledge tacit. In translating this to organisations I became aware of the importance of creating the opportunities and the environment to create knowledge (personal reflections, 25/08/2004).

Translated to my practice as an administrator, often management meetings are organised late in the day, when managers are tired and thinking of a range of other management tasks rather than the topic at hand. Within the framework of Figure 10 the need filter, my need to have a meeting, was influencing the creation of knowledge in a negative way. My capacity to influence knowledge creation is linked to my influencing on the allocation of resources associated with making more time available for management conversations (meetings) and the determination of the most effective time to allow knowledge creation.

## 8.3 ADMINISTRATOR (PRACTITIONER) KNOWLEDGE

Operating as a reflective practitioner enabled my research to be viewed as a route from competence to excellence, through the continuous improvement of my professional practice (Schon, 1983). Through my investigations I have identified two significant learnings related to the broad area of practitioner research. Firstly, while from a broad perspective practitioner research is a highly effective method for an educational administrator to bring to the investigation of their professional practice, the potential risks of the methodology should not be underestimated. My experiences with the HOD scenario group, as outlined in chapter 6, highlighted to me the tensions that can arise when the boundaries between practice and research are blurred. I believe that the close alignment, or blurring, between practice and research is at the heart of practitioner research and is vital if there is to be a truly critical self investigation of one's practice. That tensions can arise should be accepted and anticipated and subsequently addressed as they surface. The tensions should be acknowledged and accepted for what they are, challenges to

individual's worldviews that are providing learning opportunities for all involved. Practitioner research should not just be seen as a theoretical discipline but as a lived practice and not something only to be spoken about but also something to be done (McNiff, 2000).

Secondly, and from a narrower perspective, my investigations have provided me with a greater conceptualisation of the value of reconnaissance within the context of practitioner research. While McNiff et al. (2003, p.35) defined reconnaissance as the process of determining 'where I was at, what I hoped to achieve and how I thought that I would get there', little other conceptualisation was provided. In my work I elaborated on reconnaissance and identified two distinct areas of focus within the broad process of reconnaissance. These areas are:

- self reconnaissance- the exploration of my beliefs and behaviours within the areas of leadership and management; and
- situational reconnaissance- the exploration of the research context and research options and the literature related to the management of knowledge.

The reconnaissance occurring within the two research phases was also identified as being significantly different. In the phase prior to the commencement of my doctoral studies the reconnaissance was unintentional reconnaissance. While in the phase after the commencement of my doctoral studies the reconnaissance was intentional. The difference being that the intentional reconnaissance was deliberate and consciously undertaken within my studies whereas the unintentional reconnaissance was only recognised for what it was once my studies had commenced and I became aware of the writings of McNiff et al. (2003).

The unintentional reconnaissance was vital as it was this reconnaissance that ultimately heightened my interest in the area of research and eventually led me to commence a professional doctorate. Acknowledgement of the significance of unintentional reconnaissance is an acknowledgment that the process of practitioner research can encompass more than the activities undertaken during the period of formal academic enrolment and that the investigations undertaken prior to formal research confirmation are of significant value within the whole research process.

The intentional reconnaissance undertaken in the period immediately prior to my doctoral confirmation provided clarity and direction to my investigations. The investigations undertaken during this period provided me with an understanding of why I sought to research in the broad area of knowledge management and why I selected the professional doctorate as my research vehicle. Ultimately it resulted in me adopting a more critical approach to thinking about knowledge management.

#### 8.4 CLOSURE

My investigations have helped me to understand those behaviours demonstrated in my previous workplace as discussed in my reconnaissance in chapter 4. My investigations also provided an understanding of those initial warning signs evidenced in the research site (Stewart, 1997). Those signs were:

- failure to use already available knowledge;
- withholding important knowledge because of mistrust or conflicts between groups;
- holding discussions from which key people were missing; and
- failure to take heed of important information.

The model of knowledge management as a dynamic process (Figure 10) and the associated propositions present explanations for these behaviours particularly highlighting the central importance of individuals understanding self and their associated worldviews.

The chronicling of my learnings in this chapter provides a suggestion of closure. However in being 'true' to my methodology, and as argued in chapter 3, while there can be a suggestion of closure through action research, ultimately, when action research is used, closure is not possible and any answer is temporary and immediately becomes a new starting point for further exploration (McNiff, 2000). What has resulted from my investigations is an approach to research that has generated a theory for living, through me as a researcher and practitioner asking about how to improve my practice. Ultimately I came to understand that living theory was not just a formulaic approach to undertaking action research but rather 'a

lived practice, not something only to be spoken about but something to be done’ (McNiff, 2000, p.199).

The methodology has become embedded in my professional practice and is now an approach that I bring to working my way through the challenges of educational administration. While there is enthusiasm and passion for my professional growth there will be an inherent need to constantly and critically reflect on my practice. The search for personal and professional growth will continue. In the future this approach could support a similar reflection on my practice through any number of discourses, however two discourses that resonate with me are organisational trust and organisational stories.

Finally, the challenges of a living theory of practice are captured by Michael Leunig (1996) a contemporary Australian satirist in his commentary on the search for personal truth.

*In order to be truthful*

*We must do more than speak the truth.*

*We must also hear truth.*

*We must also receive truth.*

*We must also act upon truth.*

*We must also search for truth.*

*The difficult truth.*

*Within us and around us.*

*We must devote ourselves to truth.*

*Otherwise we are dishonest... (Leunig, 1996)*

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# APPENDIX 1

## SCENARIO GROUP SURVEY

*It would be appreciated if you could take 5 minutes of your time to complete the following survey. The survey is an element of the research linked to my doctoral studies. The research project is employing an action research methodology to critically examine my professional practice within the broad context of knowledge management. All information collected will be treated as confidential.*

*If you would like more detailed information about the research project please contact Paul Dillon on pdill5@eq.edu.au.*

**Firstly, please tick the relevant box.**

**I am a member of:**

- Executive     Students at risk working group     Intranet development group  
 Heads of Department, 8-12     None of the above

**Secondly, for each of the following statements please circle the option which best indicates your opinion on the creation and use of knowledge within BSDE by Paul Dillon.**

**1. Paul Dillon supports the collection and analysis of important information within BSDE.**

**Usually      Sometimes      Never      Unsure      No opinion**

**Examples of behaviours:**

- Information collection is an integral component of successful projects.
- Information collection is considered at the start of all projects.
- Databases are used to support the collection and presentation of information.
- Time is made available for discussion related to information collected.

**2. When making decisions Paul Dillon attempts to make good use of already available knowledge.**

**Usually      Sometimes      Never      Unsure      No opinion**

**Examples of behaviours:**

- Important policy decisions are based on a process of information collection, development of draft documents, opportunities provided for stakeholder feedback and subsequent amendments.
- Individuals and groups are encouraged to use available information to support discussion and debate on issues.
- Decisions are always made based on available knowledge.
- Future directions are based on generated knowledge.
- Knowledge of all staff members is sought and valued in decision making.
- Regular and structured analysis of information occurs as a means of generating knowledge eg Academic results.

**3. Paul Dillon demonstrates the open sharing of important knowledge within BSDE.**

**Usually            Sometimes            Never            Unsure            No opinion**

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**Examples of behaviours:**

- The sharing of important information e.g. meaningful minutes of meetings are kept and systematically made available to all staff members.
- Group discussions are facilitated so that all participants' views can be heard and appreciated.
- A willingness to listen and acknowledge alternative viewpoints.
- Attempts to be easily accessible for all staff members who wish to discuss issues.
- Provides explanations for actions taken.
- Copies of important policies and procedures are readily available e.g. school intranet.

**4. Paul Dillon encourages the development of trust and respect between individuals at BSDE.**

**Usually            Sometimes            Never            Unsure            No opinion**

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**Examples of behaviours:**

- Individuals are valued and treated with respect.
- Argument and conflict within the organisation are seen as normal behaviour.
- Individuals are appreciated for providing imaginative challenges and solutions.
- Individuals are confident that when expressing an opinion that the idea not the individual will be challenged.

**5. Paul Dillon involves key people in important discussions**

**Usually            Sometimes            Never            Unsure            No opinion**

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**Examples of behaviours:**

- Opinions of all sections of staff sought and appreciated
- Meetings are held on a regular basis and in a structured manner e.g.-Executive, Heads of Department, Departmental meetings, staff meetings, Local Consultative Committee, specific interest meetings.
- Discussion is encouraged and supported.

**Thirdly, please complete the following statements.**

I would define knowledge management as...

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Examples of knowledge management within BSDE are...

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## APPENDIX 2

### COLLATION OF SCENARIO GROUP SURVEY RESPONSES

#### Responses to Survey of the Students at Risk Group Members

Question	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Unsure	No opinion
Supports the collection and analysis of information	6	1			
When making decisions attempts to make good use of available knowledge	7				
Demonstrates the open sharing of important knowledge	7				
Encourages the development of trust and respect between individuals	5	1			1
Involves key people in important decisions	6				1

#### *Define knowledge management*

1. Making use of knowledge and expertise in order to make effective management decisions and to be an effective manager.
2. Collection, storage, retrieval of information created through shared dialogue and clarification of understanding. A social process.
3. I'm more confused than ever.

#### *Examples of knowledge management within BSDE*

1. Collection of information/records of students in order to determine which students are at risk and require further support and action.
2. Databases, e.g. ROW, HOD database and QCS database. These collections of data are designed to make information available to all staff, through a shared process of dialogue and clarification of valued data.

### Responses to the Survey of Executive Members

Question	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Unsure	No opinion
Supports the collection and analysis of information	3				
When making decisions attempts to make good use of available knowledge	3				
Demonstrates the open sharing of important knowledge	2	1			
Encourages the development of trust and respect between individuals	3				
Involves key people in important decisions	2	1			

#### *Define knowledge management*

The capture maintenance and sharing of information, processes that enable people working together to achieve agreed outcomes.

Listening, learning, leading.

#### *Examples of knowledge management within BSDE*

Survey tools, internal processes and procedures, internet, e-mails, newsletter, meetings, forums, etc.

### Responses to the Survey of Heads of Department

Question	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Unsure	No opinion
Supports the collection and analysis of information	4	2			
When making decisions attempts to make good use of available knowledge	5	1			
Demonstrates the open sharing of important knowledge	5*	1			
Encourages the development of trust and respect between individuals	4	2			
Involves key people in important decisions	5	1			

\* When he has the relevant information.

*Define knowledge management*

1. Effective capture, utilisation and exploitation of human knowledge and expertise for organisational advantage (Learning for the Future, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p.78).
2. Ensuring good access appropriate to information and planned opportunities to discuss the meaning of information leading to development of shared (similar) understandings.
3. The need for all stakeholders to know what needs to be discussed/action; from that the ability to use management techniques to complete a project.
4. Use of best available information to make effective decisions; Documentation of information.
5. Collecting information then using it to improve performance in the job; keep staff informed; to develop team building qualities; instil ownership of projects. Via emails and meetings –formal and informal, sharing internal information to use the ‘collective wisdom’ and experience of my staff.

*Examples of knowledge management within BSDE*

1. Computer network and databases; individual’s knowledge accumulations; HOD meetings and committee meetings and subsequent minutes; Departmental meetings and subsequent minutes.
2. The process for 11/12 assessment policy, the telephone teaching sessions and the plan for middle schooling sessions.
3. Data system for school based students; relevant information made available to all stakeholders so that the ‘picture’ is complete and not half done.
4. Seeking background in any situation; seeking all available current information.
5. My sharing of information to relevant staff that will impact on my section’s staff/resources/operation e.g. Information from HOD meetings; Sharing of specific and general information to staff; Sharing of information with HODs to improve own operational expertise.

## APPENDIX 3

### HODS SCENARIO GROUP CONVERSATION FRAMEWORK 11 FEBRUARY 2005

#### Why are we here?

- Primarily- Through conversation to reflect on our performance as a group of managers. Particularly our capacity in making or influencing decisions.
- Secondly-By agreement to allow the artefact/s of the conversation to be used in Paul's doctoral research.

#### End Products

- A list of actions
- A concept map

## Research Information

- *The research project is employing an action research methodology to critically examine my professional practice within the broad context of knowledge management.*
- An ethics consent form is provided.
- A project information sheet is provided.
- A survey is provided.

## Possible Conversation Framework

- What do we do well as a group?
- What types of decisions do we make?
- How do we gather information/knowledge to support our decision making/influencing?
- What could be indicators of effective decision making or knowledge creation?
- How effective are we as a group decision makers?
- How have I contributed to this situation?
- How could we improve our decision making/influencing?
- How can I as deputy principal support group decision making processes?

## My Protocols

- Respect the opinions of others
- Listen
- Use time effectively
- Respect confidentiality

*'We can only control our own actions'*